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Thesis

CHAUCER AND THE NEW SPIRIT OF THE FOURTEENTH CENTURY

by
Ruth May Waterhouse
B.S. in Ed., Boston University, 1929

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CHAUCER AND THE NEW SPIRIT OF THE FOURTEENTH CENTURY

Chaucer--His Value As One Who Departs From Old Precedents

It is to Geoffrey Chaucer, the Morning Star of Song, the Dawn of a national English poetry that we turn our attention, even the Father of our modern poetry. It is his skepticism of the old, traditional, and conventional in life and his interest in the new spirit of freedom that we are to consider. Someone has said that Chaucer should be read in the spring or early summer or else, perhaps, upon New Year's Day; for he is the poet "of perpetual youth, of new beginnings, of vernal love, and fresh enthusiasms."[1.] Even his poems written in later days are interested in the world and everything in it, and seem never to forget what it meant to be young. In fact Chaucer lived when the modern world itself was young and very much alive--in that fourteenth century which was for England "the seed-bursting of modern Christendom, the vita nuova."[2.]

Because Chaucer was a Morning Star, he came before his nation was quite awake, and before language, institutions, and literary conventions were established. Indeed, his own work was to play an enormous part in stabilizing them for future centuries. Even though recognition of him was to be delayed years, English literature is said to have taken rank among the foremost when she produced Geoffrey Chaucer. Chaucer is neither a Homer nor a Dante, but his

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1. Bregy, K.: Poets and Pilgrims P. 7
2. Bregy, K.: Poets and Pilgrims P. 8

position is analogous to that which they occupy towards the literature of their respective countries. Each was the first poet of his nation; not the first who had ever written poetry, "but the first who had so written poetry as to command the attention of contemporaries and of posterity.....They divide an age of light from an age of comparative ignorance."[1.] In the words of Craik, English Prose, "Chaucer's whole literary career shows him emerging from the average opinion and manner of his contemporaries and coming out from the medieval crowd to stand apart by himself, individual and free."[2.] In Modern English Literature--A Short History, by Edmund Gosse, we read, "In the last ten years of the fourteenth century,...Chaucer lifted the literature of his country out of its barbarous isolation and subserviency and placed it in the foremost rank."[3.] "He is the best good angel of the spring. 'Up rose the sunne and uprose Emilie,' and uprose her poet, the first of a line of kings."[4.] Richard Morris says, "With the Canterbury Tales commences the modern period of English literature."[5.] James Russell Lowell tells of the "exuberant freshness and greenness of spring."[6.] Charles D. Deshler speaks of Chaucer as "the most illustrious ornament of the reign of Edward the Third and his successor Richard the Second."[7.] I quote from various sources in order that we may have before us representative expressions of Chaucer's worth and contribution; that we may see that this is not the

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1. Garnett and Gosse: History of English Literature Vol.1,P.140
2. Craik, H.: English Prose P.40
3. Gosse, Edmund: Modern English Literature--A Short History P. 23
4. Chaucer Society: Essays on Chaucer P.157
5. Morris, Richard: Chaucer, Introduction P. 31
6. Lowell, J.R.: Conversations on Some of the Old Poets P.23
7. Deshler, Charles D.: Selections from the Poetical Works of Geoffrey Chaucer P.23

expression of merely one or several, but that it represents what has proved itself as time has developed the accepted estimate of Chaucer because of his attitude standing as he did at the end of an old order and at the beginning of a new. It is this newness in Chaucer's spirit and work which makes him not only an interesting study but a really worth-while one even today, so long after his own fourteenth century. For it is this characteristic which made him what he was, and placed him in the position he has been given. The way he looked at life, the way he saw it, meant a great deal in determining his spirit and methods and influence. Laurie Magnus says much when he tells us, "He saw life with morning eyes," or if we like, he "looked out on life with a new kind of sight, refusing to accept the current conventions and inherited moulds of literature."[1] Let us be thankful that he had the vision to see beyond mere traditionary conventions which were superficial to greater meaning and beauty which meant the beginning of modern and natural poetry. In his best, most characteristic passages, we can say that he avoids tediousness and "artificialities of predecessors," and "conventions and technical apparatus bequeathed to poetry."[2] He begins as a mere translator, but he becomes one of the most individual of poets; he begins with monotonous verse but attains a metrical freedom; he begins in the prevalent fashion, but soon enriches English literature with new metres of importance and a new range of subjects. In his strength Chaucer was one of the great poets. Someone has said that he was more; in after times he was to figure as historian, philosopher, and artist.

1. Magnus, Laurie: How to Read English Literature--Chaucer to Milton P. 27
2. Magnus, Laurie: How to Read English Literature--Chaucer to Milton P. 25

Perhaps it will help if we think of Chaucer's innovations and of his work as an English inventive poet, as another has, under the classifications of him as a layman, as a man of the world, and as a writer in the English language. When we stop to investigate we realize more about the significance of his writing as a layman, and what it meant. As a lay writer, "he was relieved from fetters of ecclesiastical purpose."[1] His outlook on life could be direct and "not bound by discipline of the Church,"[1] nor would he be forced to follow monastic tradition in opinions or style. He was competent to assimilate the 'free thought' of his age in countries of the intellectual Renaissance."[1] As a man of the world,--and we shall see from his life, as we go on, how truly he was a man of the world--he was "released from narrow insularity."[1] He was keenly affected by the forward movement of the nation in political and social life in which he himself had borne a part. Thus, as a writer in the English language, he "was released from conventions of diction and style which choked approaches to Nature in the French and Latin poetry of the day. His work could have a certain naiveté, and added charm."[1] He saw the life of his times and rendered it through his genius, "unhampered by any rule imposed by artificial standards, other than the laws of metre which flowed easily."[1] Indeed, when we consider his work in the light of his time it is surprising that he should have been so modern and free while certain forces of his age still loomed so high in men's eyes. "'Rich, juicy, lively, fragrant, russet-skinned old Chaucer was an Easter Beurre; the buds of a new

[1] Magnus, Laurie: How to Read English Literature--Chaucer to Milton P. 31.

summer were swelling when he appeared.'"[1]

Chaucer's Age--Growth of Greater Freedom and Independence

Yet this newness was not something disconnected, separate, and apart from the world or the life of the day. It was rather, a phase of the general change of the period with which Chaucer was identified. If we are to appreciate our topic, then we must look beyond him to the century itself, and to the very life of the people in that age. We must know something of the England of his day. Without this background, we cannot evaluate Chaucer properly. We must face the England he faced, and try to see something of its influence upon him; and then we shall see how he, bringing to bear his varied experiences in the light of his own originality, was able to contribute mightily in turn to his England, which had helped to make possible opportunities for various contacts with life, and opportunities for inspiration which was to be far-reaching. Chaucer lived in the Middle Ages in the last sixty years of the fourteenth century. Europe, of course, was still medieval; Chaucer's world, we must admit, was partly medieval; and he grew up under some influences of medieval literature and ideas. But having said that Chauver lived in a medieval world, we have said but half; there is another important phase to the England of Chaucer. If it was medieval, the world of Chaucer was also that of the coming Renaissance. We cannot study the history of this century without seeing traces of the new spirit growing under the old forms which it will presently break. This was a brilliant, stirring,

[1] Holmes, O.W.: P. 15 in Magnus, Laurie: How to Read English Literature--Chaucer to Milton

active time to be alive-- a time, too, of violent, if dramatic contrasts. Since Chaucer is in so many ways typical of the new spirit and world, as a man, and as a poet, and since we are interested primarily in his newness, the history of England at this time as exemplifying the newer trend is of special significance to us. England was restive under new ideas. Change was in the air, and some were beginning in this century to be impatient, and even to rebel against institutions long established, or against modes of thought long accepted. The old order remained yet; but as we look back, in the light of later centuries, we see signs of a new order. Europe, medieval still, may be said to have been on the threshold of the Renaissance, a wonderful but critical time.

Having this background clearly in mind, we shall be able to place Chaucer in his proper setting, for the age in which he lived had a strong influence in moulding his character and his writings. Certainly the days of Chaucer were fascinating ones in which to live when the buds were swelling which were to burst into full bloom later on. But before the fullness, must come the beginnings of a movement or a change from centuries-old ways to different conditions, methods, attitudes, and desires. We must look at the mode of living in the system which underlay the scheme of life and must understand and feel the power which lay behind it, the very atmosphere, and the reasons for it; and we must feel the change which was coming and gripping so surely even the vital part of society. But before we can really appreciate the significance, we must know something of the things which had been, but which were about to pass away; something of the strength and power which had been able for so long

to hold the people together under unquestionable authority through the help of age-old traditions and customs of law, -- to hold them together under a system which was more like a machine working, than like a human being advancing, under a system which somehow withheld growth and development in various activities and fields of life. We can better evaluate the worth of the new when we lay alongside it the old in comparison, in order to see the advance, and the improvement over the old. The latest development of a locomotive, an automobile, or an airplane is wonderful, but place beside it the old model, and how much clearer the differences stand out. As we examine it, we can see plainly the details which go to make the whole machine one which is better and which should run smoother and give better service. So it is, to a degree, with our study. We cannot merely say, "Times changed, one system gave way to another." We cannot see clearly the significance until we realize something about things as they had been and were to be.

It is true that during the earlier medieval centuries stability was a marked characteristic of society. Institutions went on through time with only slight alterations. But when we come to the fourteenth century, Chaucer's century, especially the middle of it, changes reached a point where they definitely affected the underlying elements in the society of the day. This fact that the old unchallenged stability was being broken into and weakened is a key thought for us in this study since it developed the skepticism of the old, and the growth of greater freedom and independence. Before we analyze more in detail the various factors which are important, and the actual conditions and institutions which did change, let us

get ourselves into the atmosphere by taking a general view of the century as one that was working towards new ways. "The age in which Chaucer wrote was one of passionate change, of old things coming to an end and the world being re-born,.... New ways of thought were creating new ways of life." [1.] Another describes for us as keenly as this: "It was an age of intense activity--a singularly 'modern' time." [2.] The writer goes on to say that one is tempted to assert that all the problems which vex the world today either sprang up or were especially troublesome in the sixty years of Chaucer's life. [2.] She says that labor gave trouble in more ways than one. The Black Death (which we shall consider later more at length) cut down the supply of farm workers over the country. Those who were left, although previously little better than slaves through new circumstances, made bold to assert themselves "in a manner that terrified vested interests and prompted futile legislation." [2.] Industrial problems were acute in Edward the Third's reign. Changes in war practices were brought by the waning of chivalry and the use of gunpowder and cannon, and by "Eastern questions." There came an interest in learning and the spread of education. "Anarchy borrowed the language of democracy in challenging a thousand accepted rights of human government, and both the spiritual and political prestige of the Church. It was a scrambling and unquiet time, when nobody was at rest but the dead." [2.]

[1.] Masefield, John: Geoffrey Chaucer, The First of the Great English Poets P. 5

[2.] Bregy, K.: Poets and Pilgrims P.10

These statements are filled with potence for us because they, in brief compass suggest so much of the momentous action with which we are concerned that took place in Chaucer's time, and upon which we are to look more in detail shortly in order to see the skeptical bearing and trend rife in this period. "Chaucer was an active contemporary of events in the most remarkable century which had thus far rolled over Europe--the age of Edward the Third and the Black Prince, of Crecy and Poitiers, of English bills and bows, stronger than French lances; the age of Wycliff, of reformation in religion, government, language, and social order." [1.] These statements picture this age for us as it was by pointing out some of its high spots, some of its tendencies which were working so definitely and certainly in varied fields of life. "It was a time for revolution; change was in the air, the older condition of society was passing away." [2.] As we go on, we shall prove these statements, but that we may know something of what the different movements led to and the large results they had on the century as a whole, I feel it valuable to consider the broad view briefly before we analyze more specifically. Then we should have a better comprehension of the background and pattern of it all. "A movement for more light was shaking the known world." [3.] And, once more, before we come to definite movements, let us listen to Pancoast when he says: "Chaucer lived in a century full of interest and change, when England , along with the rest of Europe was growing impatient of the cramped life and restricted thought of the Middle

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1. Coppee: English Literature Considered as an Interpreter of English History P. 61
2. Tickner, F.W.; A Social and Industrial History of England P. 156
3. Masefield, John: Geoffrey Chaucer, The First of the Great English Poets P. 6.

Ages, and was throbbing with that new life which was to find expression in the Renaissance. The old Medieval world yet remained, but everywhere in the midst of its most characteristic institutions we can see the beginning of the new order destined to take its place." [1] As we come close to these actual fields we are to study, we find there religious, social, and political problems closely allied and interwoven with each other and affected by each other. It is hard to separate them under tabulated heads and call one a religious problem or a social one since it is more than that alone. It affects and is affected by ties which bind it to other lines. They are so closely related to each other one reacts upon another as a cause or an effect. We cannot separate even one problem into a compartment by itself; it covers too large a phase and involves too large a variety of interests and conceptions. It is too complex a situation and too comprehensive.

Decline of the Old Manorial System

There were many expressions of the new feeling, but there was one upon which life and sustenance depended and around which the whole scheme of life revolved. This was the decline of the old manorial or feudal system. Before we can treat intelligently its decline, we must look to it as it had been, a very backbone of society for centuries in the Middle Ages. It was to break away from the cramped life and restricted thought of the old regime. But what had this old feudal system been under which people had lived so long ? What were the principles which had tied it together and the conditions it had held under its sway ? The Normans by their method of control had recast society upon the

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[1] Pancoast, H. S.; Representative English Literature from Chaucer to Tennyseon P. 27

feudal basis and strengthened feudalism in England, Under this system each one's rights and duties were determined by his position as a holder of land. Certain tenants-in-chief held land directly from the king as overlord rendering him military service and obedience and paying certain dues, while he gave his protection in return. The tenants-in-chief let out portions of their land in the same way to subordinate vassals, and so on in different stages. There was a dangerous feature about continental feudalism in that each tenant pledged allegiance to his immediate lord alone. He might, you see, wage war even against the king himself on behalf of his own lord without being guilty of treason. William the First avoided this by making tenants of all grades swear fealty to and do homage for him at a great meeting. He, too, tried to lessen any danger of united rebellions of rich barons by spreading out the land granted to such over various parts of the country. We can readily see from this method, some being under others who are higher in importance, wealth, and actual control (which was able to be used with an iron hand) how bound down some would have to be in any such system of classes. "Feudalism lowered the status of the English peasantry and brought them to a state of vassalage."[1] more marked than before. To be sure, the manorial system with the lord of the manor and these various classes all bound under him was growing up in England before the Normans conquered (1066), but it was not the hard, rigid system which the Normans made of it. Conditions were different when the had-been enemy stepped into the place of stern authority. Sense the feeling. Perhaps the most distinct difference the Saxons felt was the absence of their old

1. Tickner, F.W. : A Social and Industrial History of England P.7

English overlords who were a part of the manor, part of the "blood of the manor, as no Norman lord could ever hope to be." [1] So, it was not only that conditions were actually harder but that there was a spirit, an atmosphere, some tie which used to be that was missing now; perhaps the feeling of the human soul among those who can never understand him, even under their power, and his very life in their hands. After 1066 the lowly folk were not the same race as the lords, the Normans. The latter spoke differently, dressed differently, and behaved differently, and they often despised the conquered Saxons even though these were the ones whose labor and produce maintained the lords and made the manor valuable. The poorer Saxons were made to feel that their position was worse, more servile and restricted, and arduous as feudalism strengthened. This was the feeling existing when the Normans conquered and tightened their reign and the feeling still existed for some time. It could not be erased in a moment. Time was needed to change the attitude and conditions. Of course, much later than this, after the two races had become fused into one more completely, as was possible only with the passing of time and the coming of new situations, changes were made possible which were to grow and spread over life. Feudalism was comprised of a combination of "land-holding, political right and sworn personal fidelity."

We shall appreciate of what consequence the land itself was in this system as we study it more, and how it represented wealth, and determined one's status. We must translate ourselves back into the far days which were so different from ours before the use of money changed so much the mode of life, and the

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1. Allsopp H.: An Introduction to English Industrial History P. 19
2. Allsopp H.: An Introduction to English Industrial History

means of exchange and method of determining one's status. This greater use of money is one of the marked changes which affected various conditions, and is so important we shall speak of it more, later, under the changes taking place. We must remember that land was the necessary factor in the arrangement of the feudal system. The land itself was wealth. William the Conquerer knew this, and he claimed it all, and lent it out to chief followers, who, in return, were to provide him with armed warriors and remuneration from time to time. Now, the tenant farmer pays his rent based upon the value of his land in terms of its productivity, its accessibility, or some such advantage. Back in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, though, payments depended upon the relation in which one stood towards his lord. These people were not tenants as we think of the meaning of this term today, but land-owners. The holders could not leave the manor nor dispose of their lands by selling them. Capital had hardly entered agricultural proceedings. There was not investment of money in land. There were two great essentials at this time to remember; they were land and labor. The lord gave land and protection in exchange for the labor; labor and produce were given for protection. The income of the lord depended upon the way his manor was stocked with men and cattle. It was an undertaking which had a mutual agreement with privileges and duties on both sides. So we see that the very bond which held the people together was land. All the land was thought of as belonging to the king who lent it to his barons, and they, in turn, to others of various grades of standing, who, as we have said, paid by labor, produce, and fulfillment of vows of homage or duty, some by acting as soldiers, or by providing soldiers. Practically everthing in life, life itself,

depended upon land; the king's army, much of his revenue, much of the lord's revenues. Life in England in older centuries was so different from that of today it is hard to realize what it was really like. England is said to have been divided into more than nine thousand divisions called manors, each of which was in the possession of an overlord. The king, too, was a manorial lord, and had manors on which he depended for food supplies. Of course these manors varied as to size, value, and population.

As we consider the manor, we are interested especially in the classes of people we find there. The breaking down of these class boundaries and limitations is to portray the spirit of skepticism. Each lord, as we know, possessed rights over the rest under him who made their living by cultivating land held from him. But what are the respective privileges and duties of the various grades of people? There were the freemen. Their land was lent to them to cultivate for the lord, and they were obliged to pay "the feudal dues." [1.] They had to appear faithfully in the hall of the manor on specified days and satisfy the owner with his payments and dues. But greater in number than the freemen were the villeins. They held their land in "servile tinure." [2.] They were not free to give all their time to their land. They must work a certain number of days each week for the lord and also give extra days at busy times. They could not leave the district without his consent. They were, in fact, his; they belonged to him. If they performed their duties, they had certain strips of land, and if their lord was a good one they would be protected against interference. The services and payments of the villeins were various. They, as did the free ten-

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1. Cheyney, E.P.: An Introduction to the Social and Industrial History of England P. 41

2. Allsopp, H.: An Introduction to English Industrial History P.9

ants, usually had to make some payments in money at regular periods during the year, and had to pay some regular payments in kind, more often than the freemen. The fine they paid on inheritance of their land was apt to be bigger, and heriot--payment from property left by a deceased tenant--was more regularly and universally collected which was not always the case for a free tenant. The large part of the liability of the villeins, however, was in personal, corporal service to the lord. Of course there was a time each week demanded by work on his land, and the labor of extra times in busy seasons of the year, and in addition there were other forms of agricultural labor as local custom on each manor determined. Some of these extra specified services might be ploughing a certain number of acres fall and spring; haying a certain number of acres, carrying grain to the barn or market, building ditches or hedges, driving sheep, or doing any other general chores. It is said that on the average more than half the villeins' time was required to be given in service to the lord. This actual labor with its burden was heavy for the villeins, and they were loaded with much heavier service than the freemen. The villeins were subject to other kinds of burdens and payments also. The lord could demand a payment upon the marriage of a woman of villein rank, or upon breach of chastity. Then, too, the lord could tax this rank often to any extent he desired. More than this, the villein was bound to the soil and could not leave to seek better conditions. If he did run away, the lord could have him brought back by an order from court. He even had to have permission to sell his cattle and had to pay for that. He had no standing in the courts and if he did try to bring suit against his lord, the

proof of his villeinage was enough to put him out of court, and then his only recourse would be to the local court of the manor where either the lord or his representative presided. According to the law, he had no property of his own since all his possessions in the end were the property of the lord. Still another class was that of the cottars or bordars who were similar to the villeins, only they held less land with a cottage and had to perform fewer labors though of a similar kind, and were required to make certain payments and give special services. In return for the services performed, it was customary for the lord to provide food for a meal or two a day, and according to custom, the kind and amount for each meal. So in addition to the possession of their land and rights in common pasture there were some compensations and alleviations of the burdens of the villeins and cottars. Lowest of all the classes were the serfs who had no land unless it were just a very little plot around a hut. These were the slaves who had to give practically all their time to the lord, and who were entirely dependent upon his will.

Usually there were a few others besides these described in the various classes, who were not in the body of cultivators of the land. This village of people was generally a parish too, so there was a church and a parish priest who was set apart from the villagers by his education and ordination, though he might hold acres and belong to the class of peasants. As we shall see when we look at the agricultural system involved in the village, the mill was a valuable possession of the lord, and it was through this that he was enabled to receive much profit, since by almost universal custom the tenants would have their grain ground here, paying the miller, who, in turn paid

the lord. There was usually a manor house which might be so large it seemed like a castle, or on the other hand of such a type it would be hard to distinguish it from the primitive houses in the village. It might be occupied regularly by the lord of the manor or occasionally, by a steward, or used as the gathering-place of the manor courts. Often there might be a blacksmith; sometimes a chance weaver or other craftsman in the village.

Having indicated the classes the breakdown of which was to exhibit greater freedom, we now proceed to notice the lay-out of the manor. Briefly, it usually consisted of: a large tract of land with woodland and waste surrounding three great open fields; the lord's private land (demesne); the church and church-lands; the cottages of the various classes; perhaps a flour-mill owned by the lord; and possibly over a stream a bridge belonging also to the lord. The bridges and streams were more signigicant than it might at first seem when we know how important they became as centres for the growth and development of life. A manor, then, was a village with the land around it. There was always plenty of woodland around each manor which provided the inhabitants with wood both for fuel and purposes of building; and which also enabled the manufacture of rude agricultural implements, and provided pasturage for some of the animals. The rest of the land was divided into three portions: common pasture and uncultivated waste, arable, and a portion of meadow land. All the people of the manor, the lord included, had the right of grazing a limited amount of stock in the common pasture and waste; the meadow land usually was divided so that each tenant had the opportunity of getting some hay every year; the arable land was alloted to the villagers

in strips, the system of which we shall study presently. All this was under the jurisdiction of the lord whose stewards or bailiffs saw that the rules and customs were carried out. The combination of manors under a single lord made a system of officials necessary who should manage the manors in the absence of the overlord in his own desired way. Sometimes the owner of a number of manors visited the different ones successively remaining at each with his followers long enough to consume the produce received from the villagers. So there came to be certain officials the chief of whom was the seneschal or steward often responsible for the management of several manors. He it was who was the representative and even the adviser of the lord. He must know in detail the value of the manor, know the stock, and the work to be done; he must know the duties of officials subordinate to him, into the performance of whose duties he must inquire. Next in importance was the bailiff whose duty it was to manage a single estate, to see that all the work was done well, to collect dues, and to manage the estate in general. The reeve was closely associated with the bailiff in watching the interests of the master. There were other servants such as the hayward whose duty it was to be responsible for the ploughing, haymaking, and harvesting; the shepherd, oxherd, and swineherd whose duties are obvious. We must remember that probably no two manors were exactly alike in all customs or arrangement. We shall have to think broadly in terms of one that is typical. Mainly the whole life of the "vill" [1] gathered around the arable, meadow and pasture land, and the social position of the tenants depended on the land held. Knowing something of the lay-out of the agri-

[1] Tickner, F.W.: *A Social and Industrial History of England* P.19

cultural village which with its population and surrounding lands was often spoken of as the "vill", [1] and knowing what people were to be found there, we are ready to study the agricultural system involved in such a plan. In the Middle Ages village life was predominant in the greater part of England.

The support of the village was, as we must see, in its agriculture. Let us look at the agricultural system created by this mode of living. Part of it we have already suggested but we need a more definite survey of the details to show how the management affected the lives of the people actually and daily and to see in what way it made it necessary for them to live. Remember, the manorial system existed for several centuries in England. Farming was still the main occupation of the people. But back in the twelfth century the farming was carried on not for markets or profits, but for subsistence only. In these days there was little intercourse between different parts of the country; the towns in a modern sense were very few and those making progress towards town life were still mostly overgrown villages, and farming was the main occupation. Primitive methods had to be used, thus adding to the number of workers required. Very few people were engaged in manufactures and if so were active practically wholly in producing goods for local consumption. As to the actual system, it is called the open field system. Why the three fields? It is an interesting story, and gives a comparison to our modern methods and knowledge which these people, although lacking, managed to do without. People had found by experience that if wheat was sowed on the same piece of ground every year their crops would grow poorer and smaller. The science of Botany has made clear to us what they probably did

[1] Tickner, F. W. A Social and Industrial History of England P.19

not understand; that wheat takes from the soil certain minerals it needs, and unless these are replaced, after a few years wheat will not grow well on the same ground. But our ancestors found that oats and barley would grow well on the patch which had produced wheat previously; and the science of Botany has shown us that these do not require the same minerals. But even though wheat was sowed alternately with the other, the ground quickly grew less fertile. Thus, even though these people were without much knowledge of more recent days they did find it profited them to leave a piece of plough-land fallow every year to rest, and grow grass and weeds which would be eaten by sheep and cattle which would furnish the fertilizer containing necessary minerals. So there developed finally a three-field system. They needed wheat for bread and oats for porridge and cattle-food. To get enough of both and to have a good piece of land rested for the next year's crop three fields were necessary. So the customary method was a three-course rotation of rye or wheat, with oats or barley in the next year, and the land lying fallow the third year. Rye or wheat was sown in the autumn on the fallow section; in the early part of the year time was given to clearing away wheat stubble from the crop of the year before and getting the land ready for the crop to come of barley or oats. When the barley was sown, the fallow was cleared of the stubble from the crop of the year before and ploughed. The hay harvest from the meadow land followed and the harvest of corn from the cultivated strips. After this, the fallow portion was ploughed and wheat was sown. Threshing with flail, thatching and other general work filled the time of the months reamining. After each part of the meadow and arable was cleared

of its crop, it was opened to common pasture and the cattle were allowed to roam over it at will.

The methods of work were primitive. The ploughing was usually done by oxen, but eight were regularly required and the villein whose duty it was to do such work rarely possessed more than two oxen, so much of the work was cooperative. Although each lord owned his own plough and oxen usually, his work was done by the villeins and sometimes they were even called upon to provide the oxen, or the plough, which, with large wheels and short handles was different from a modern one. They harrowed with a hand implement little better than a large rake; the clods were broken by a mattock. It took five men a day to reap and bind two acres. Agriculture in all its lines was extremely crude. Only eight or nine bushels of wheat or rye were expected from an acre while later there were thirty. The variety of crops was small. Potatoes, roots, and artificial grasses were unknown, and other root crops and fresh vegetables were little cultivated apparently. Wheat or rye was the chief grain crop though beans, peas, flax, and hemp were grown some. Field beans were used sometimes for food but usually for cattle forage for winter. But the main supply for winter had to be hay and for this they depended upon the natural meadows entirely since no clover or grasses that could be raised artificially on dry ground were yet known. Meadow land was valuable; it was estimated as twice as valuable as arable ground, at least. We can imagine what a struggle it was to get sufficient fodder for the oxen, horses, and breeding animals through the winter. Because of this problem it was impossible to keep their stock all winter, so animals that were for food were killed in the fall and salted down. It is said

that a good deal of the unhealthiness of the medieval life may be attributed to so much salt meat. Of course the summer pasture for the horses, cattle, sheep, and swine of the village was to be had partly from the arable land after the crops had been taken off, partly from the meadows after the hay had been cut, and especially from the common pasture. The stock was one of the profitable parts of farming although the loss from disease was great. Oxen were used generally, horses rarely, for working. Cows were kept for dairy purposes. There was no attempt to fatten stock for food; the preference of oxen over horses for draught purposes was that they could ultimately be eaten. The meat, thus, was very poor and it is said "the horn, hoof, and hide represented a large proportion of the value of an ox." [1] Sheep were used especially for the value of their wool but the fleeces were light and the animals were small in size. Both winter and disease prevented improvement in breeding. The breed of all farm animals was small. Pigs were plentiful and ran over the woodland and waste during most of the year under the care of the swineherd. Fowls, eggs, and poultry were cheap and plentiful. Carts for the work in general were few and cumbrous, the harvesting of grain was done with a sickle, and grass mowed with a short, straight scythe. Even the distance of outlying fields from the farm buildings of the village added to the laboriousness of all else.

We come now to the actual division and method of allotment of the arable land. The fields were divided into strips of one

[1] Tickner, F.W.: A Social and Industrial History of England. P. 17

acre or half an acre each. Why was this system used ? The answer is found in the fact that in those early times, before money was much used, land was almost the only wealth a man could have. His position, as we have previously stated, depended not upon the amount of money he had, nor even upon the number of sheep, cows, or houses, but first and foremost depended upon the amount of land lent to him and secondly on the conditions on which the land was lent to him, for this determined his rank. As we know, the freeman held the land on comparatively easy terms rendering certain small services to the lord, appearing regularly at his court, and behaving himself and observing the customs of the manor; the villein, on conditions of a fixed amount of week-work and special work. Though protected while performing his duties, he was unfree because he had to perform them there on the manor which he could not leave. The serf held no land, so was not free at all--he was owned by the lord. Each person within the different ranks was equal to each of the others in the same rank. The freemen were equal to each other; the villeins, equal to each other; and the serfs also. Of course some of the land was stony, some swampy; some on the other hand, rich soil; but some, heavy with clay. Each person would prefer all his allotment to be in the portion of the best land. "If freeman John is to have 60 acres in the wheat-field he would naturally like it all to be where the rich deep soil is." [1] So each one would desire. "The fairest way, therefore, seems to be to cut all the land up into small strips of about one acre each and to give freeman John a strip here and a strip

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[1] Allsopp, H.: An Introduction to English Industrial History P.13

there, some good and some bad, until he has his 60 acres altogether."[1] So every spring the men who were entitled to hold land gathered together, and, under the supervision of the officials, cast lots for the strips in the different fields until each man had his share. There was evidently little quarreling about the quality of land each had, and the scheme was really devised for fairness to all concerned. However, this method was wasteful and had marked weaknessess. The means of access provided was by narrow unploughed grassy strips or balks along the length, and broader headlands or balks at the ends; all in all, these balks themselves wasted a considerable part of the field. And, indeed, think of all the time wasted by "freeman John"[2] just walking from strip to strip, for his holding was scattered through the fields. And, too, much of one man's time spent in weeding his own strip might be useless if his neighbors' strips were not kept weeded by their holders. There were other weaknesses to such a system. There was little scope for originality or enterprise. All were compelled to farm according to a common plan; each man had to sow the same kinds of crops as his neighbors, and had to reap them by a given date. Because of the mixed ownership of the strips, the clean worker might find his own ground choked with weeds from seeds carried from neighboring land; one careless or incompetent farmer might easily cause disease and pestilence to spread since cattle, sheep, and pigs ran together. Such a system was almost stationary. We can see how improvements in farming were practically impossible; in fact the customs of the manor and tradition were the basic controlling principles and any one who desired to do anything different

[1] Allsopp, H.: An Introduction to English Industrial History P.13
[2] Allsopp, H.: An Introduction to English Industrial History P.14

would be looked upon with eyes askance. We see what very little scope for variation there was for the people. Especially was this true of the villeins and serfs, who lived in their little hovels, tilled the little patch of land around their hut, worked on their open-field strips, toiled for the lord of the manor, tended the few fowls, sheep, pigs or cattle they held, attended the lord's court, paid their dues, and lived their narrow, restricted lives. On special days such as Sundays and holy-days they went to the village church where the priest was,--he who was probably the only one in the neighborhood with even a smattering of learning. They had to render tribute to him too; they paid him first-fruits and tenths. They gave him of the first of every kind; and in addition were supposed to render one-tenth of their produce to maintain not just their own church, but the great Pope in Rome who was anxious that the taxes should be paid regularly. Relief from work itself came only on holy and feast days. The whole impression of the lowlier folk of the manor is one of people who work hard, have very little liberty, little pleasure, wretched housing and clothing, much plain food and drink; who live on just one manor, rarely having even a visit to another manor, the roads being few and those bad. So life on the medieval manor was hard the greater part of the population being subject to the burdens of serfdom, and all sharing in the arduous labor, coarseness and lack of variety of food, unsanitary surroundings, liability to the rigor of winter, and attacks of pestilence.

Yet why did this manorial system last so long with all its waste, weakness, and narrowness ? What was the reason ? Partly because the arrangement did the best it could under the circumstances. Partly too, because the manor was like a little world

in itself quite self-sufficing, growing the produce for its own use little of it going outside the village; a failure of crops in one village in such a system might mean famine. A manor may be thought of as a little kingdom having hardly anything to do with adjoining manors. Let us see how it survived by its own labors. It produced practically all the food required; its people were dressed in rough clothes of leather they themselves made, or of wool spun and woven or knitted in their homes. All implements except the few iron tools were made at the manor, and even once in a while an iron tool was worked up by the smith. So not only was the system a real attempt at just distribution but it was also based on a sort of fellowship and cooperation. But there was a stronger reason why this old plan lasted so long. Greater still did the fact that it had its roots so far back in a distant past weigh. It had an enormous weight of tradition behind it. We know what a powerful factor old tradition is even today in the eyes of some, even when so much that is new and unheard of is making its appearance constantly. To this day, some people are prone to boast of and glorify what their ancestors did and to long for "the good old days." However, in the villeins' lives especially, respect and heed for what the grandfathers had done played a bigger part than we can imagine. "The custom of the manor, in other words, the rules and traditions which had grown up with the manor, controlled men's lives even more strongly then than our laws and policemen control our lives now." [1] This custom was felt even by the lord, too, --- even he had to respect the customs of the ages on the manor. It was these

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[1] Allsopp, H.: An Introduction to English Industrial History P. 17.

which made the system. The lord had to treat his freemen and villeins and serfs as the people of these classes had been treated for generations past. He, and they also, could demand what had been demanded in the past. The past was their basis--it was all they could go by--it was the pattern. See how stationary this system would have to be looking towards the past for its basis, -- for its law. What services could the lord ask his men to perform ? To answer this, look to the past. What had been done in the days gone by ? This, then, must be the thing to do, the determining force; it was precedent beyond which no one would think of venturing; nor would he dare if he should venture to think; nor was there apparently any reason to do so for centuries. So, too, the men if they did not conform absolutely to the demand made upon them, according to custom, could be fined, and some or all land could be taken away; a freeman could be degraded and lose his rank to that of a villein; so, a villein could also lose what little freedom he had with its respectability and be made even a serf. Why did the chiefs have power to force this ? Because through the ages tradition had given them that power. Thus, people were ruled by custom, lord and subordinates. So if there was any doubt about the matter, any question which arose to be settled, where should they turn ? Where was the clearing-house ? What laws were to determine ? The laws of custom. But when in doubt as to the custom, what then ? At such a time when doubtful about any particular matter an inquiry was held and the wise men (chosen from the oldest) were asked what the custom was. From the social viewpoint as well as from the economic, life of the medieval manor was most clearly marked by predominance of custom and by the character-

istic of the close relationship in which the inhabitants were bound to one another, and their corresponding complete separation from the outside world. The common pasture with the strips of land belonging to each other intermingled in the open fields, the cooperation necessary performing daily duty, the contiguity of their very dwellings, universal membership in the same church of the parish, common attendance there and also in the manor courts-- all this must have been a combination which made the vill an organization of remarkable unity and narrowness. This was a self-centred life. Its very make-up was moulded around itself as a center. "This self-centred life, economically, judicially, and ecclesiastically so nearly independent of other bodies, put obstacles in the way of change." [1.] There seemed to be no provision for growth, individualism, originality or change. It was not fashioned to grow and develop with the ages, but to last without change only so long as the same old conditions could hold. It prohibited intercourse beyond the manor, and we can see within what a narrow little circle it allowed life to revolve in every way of living and from every viewpoint of class, method, and means. It opposed the growth of a feeling of common national life. "The manorial life lay at the base of the stability which marked the medieval period." [1]

However, the time came when life itself changed--when human lives and individuals to carry on this system were fewer. What could be done then ? There was bound to be a change in management and method even though the leaders fought it and tried still to cling to the old. Centers grew up, communications became more frequent, new feeling arose, and what of the manor ?

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1. Cheyney, E.P.: An Introduction to the Social and Industrial History of England P. 52

Could it remain the old manor in the midst of a growing, changing life which demanded changed methods of living ? It became actually impossible as we shall see. And this brings us to the point of the decline of the manorial system which we could never understand or appreciate without first knowing it in its glory, at its height, with its long-standing customs, traditions, and unwritten laws of the centuries. In the decline of this strong system we see the growth of greater freedom and independence. This is partly the expression of the skeptical attitude being emphasized at this time. We today can look back and trace the force of changes which took place, and follow it through the centuries to see how greater growth and development, even ours, today, was to come. The manorial system must go, but not all at once. It lasted for about two hundred years after 1086 with only small changes. But by 1300 greater changes were beginning to operate. Let us remember as we face the changes which were coming in the life of the day that we are looking at them from the viewpoint of the frowth of greater freedom and independence, which was to invoke marked advances. These advances caused the breakdown of the old system which had been stable so long, held together by custom and tradition. When the power of this tradition broke, the old shackles began to weaken and were to fall apart more and more. With the rift in the sway of the traditionary, conventional authority over all of life, comes the stepping-stone of change which was to mean freedom in the end. But there were certain causes and conditions which determined the working-out and development from one stage to another, from the old to the new. This is a broad field and in it we are to see many different forces interweaving to convert

society from the ancient to the modern. We must consider various walks of life; one affected others. Changes are not limited narrowly to just one little phase of life; they make themselves manifest in all of life.

England now, with the fourteenth century, was getting to be a different England. The Norman lords and the Saxon peasants had come closer together through the years since the Normans entered with stern authority. They had had to live together, and now the two races had become nearly completely fused into one with the same language, customs, and the same outlook. England's place and England's viewpoint were different; they had to be; it was becoming a great nation; there was more feeling of a national unity as the people united in wars with the French. Thousands of men had been sent on Crusades to Eastern lands; thousands had been to France, Italy, Palestine. Imagine the broader outlook which would come with this wider intercourse, and travel, and knowledge. England had developed trade, am important trade; especially was wool coming to be of consequence as we shall see. Growing trade alone was to affect England's position and standing, was to make necessary vital changes in the life and means of living, even in the independence of England and its inhabitants. All these activities and more which we shall view were making England itself as a whole, less self-contained and more anxious to seek and find the good things which others already enjoyed. So the manors in the old system were becoming also less self-contained and less isolated. See the effect of the influences brought to bear on them both directly and indirectly. We know that in the manorial system any trade was largely within the manor village itself. Produce

or manufactures were for local consumption as we have seen. We shall give a larger place to the consideration of the change and growth of society, its towns, trade at home and abroad, but suffice it here to say that when centers grew larger and broader, and when people mingled more with neighboring sections and countries, when trade increased, the use of money increased as well. This increase in the use of money is really a step under the big topic of the growth of greater freedom and independence. It is, however, so closely tied up with changes produced in the old manorial system, we shall consider it as one of the causes which helped to break down the old system of society. But the momentous consequence the increase in the use of money brought was to affect more than just a means of exchange as such. It was to revolutionize society, to make possible a different basis; and because of this new basis, changed and improved methods of living, even more liberty in individual lives and in society. Let us see how this was brought about. We remember in the old manorial system wealth was not based upon money but upon land. From now on, however, coined money, pieces of gold and silver, were to count more and play a bigger part than ever before this. We have seen that previously most of the people in early Norman times in England hardly ever saw money, not to mention using it. The king, the lords, and the freemen probably did use some, but the villeins or serfs rarely had the chance. Throughout the twelfth century money was becoming more and more usual and by 1300 almost everyone used at least a little money during the year. It was Henry the Second who caused money to be used more frequently when he decided to change from asking his barons to come with their soldiers to

fight for him as they, by custom of the manor, had been bound to do. Now, he decided in the future to require them to pay him a sum of money about equal to what it would cost each baron to bring his soldiers to war.

This would be an advantage to him not merely because of money which would be paid, but because of what it would enable him to do. Now, he would not have to depend upon the bodies of men brought to him by the barons often poorly trained; he could hire soldiers of the kind he wanted. Antother big cause for the increase of the use of money was the Crusades. The barons who wanted to go needed money for expenses. King Richard's ransom had to be paid in money, too, and to raise it, all had to be taxed. Money was necessary for everyone. But we are interested primarily in how the increase in the use of money altered the manorial system, and helped to break it down. Just as it would be more profitable for Henry the Second to pay wages to soldiers he himself hired rather than have any men the barons might bring them, so it would be more profitable for a lord to pay wages for hired labor to good workers rather than to have every villein and serf whether good or poor come. His work would be more satisfactorily done. Then, too, if the king were pressing the lord for money when he, in turn, needed it he could tell his villeins, now, to pay less produce but part money a year thus providing a better way all around. For from the viewpoint of the villein, he, also, would gain. Just when he needed to work on his strips, he had often been called to work for the lord while he had his own amount of produce to prepare for the manor and the Church. It would be a relief for him to be freed from the duty of some of the usual and often

burdensome services he had owed his lord. If he received wages for labor he could hire other men to work for him. If he could be allowed to pay a small sum of money a year in place of labor he might be able to sell food which his family would not need, to some serfs who had no land and were beginning to sell their labor. We can see that these conditions would not have been possible without the use of money, and the demand for it. The need for it in everyday life by the king, the lords, the people, the traders, and all, brought about changes deeper than would seem probable; it was to reorganize society upon a different system entirely. So, because of the slowly increasing use of money, the lord is willing and sometimes glad to have money-rent instead of produce, and to employ hired labor instead of forced. And the villein is just as ready to gain a slightly greater freedom which comes from working for a wage and is even anxious to pay with rent instead of with services and produce wholly. He is glad to commute his labor for money; he would rather do this than be forced at the whim and authority of the overlord. Hence two great changes which were slowly yet surely making themselves felt more lastingly upon the old manors which had gripped the people for so long a time were: "(1) the king and the lords were beginning to demand money-rents for land; (2) the working men were beginning to demand that they should be paid in money for their labor and that they should not be compelled to labor for their overlords according to the customs of their manors." [1] There was a gradual development going on in which "the land was

[1] Allsopp, Henry: An Introduction to English Industrial History
P. 26

ceasing to be the bond which united all the people, the foundation on which all was built. Instead of land, money was beginning to be the link between the worker and the employer." [1]

But the force of custom was powerful; changes worked into the old fabric very slowly; the threads of the old weakened and gave way only gradually. It was on only a few manors that commutation was used to any great extent at first, but it was starting and growing towards a more complete breakdown of the old system. The beginning meant its downfall later. The lords, at first, were afraid to disturb the old ways by which manors had been governed. How could the warp and woof be broken ? Could they part with their basic principles of life ? There was not such pressing need to change the methods, yet, as there would be; so far as the workers were concerned, they were in no position to say or to know what was to their advantage. They were uneducated; they were bound by bonds of custom; there would be no thought of their ideas being needed; they themselves would hardly expect it. They knew little of what was happening on other manors; and, anyway, what inducement would there be of seeking to alter their conditions of work when the lord had the power of the law, and the power to punish awfully if they were troublesome ? Consequently, only here and there was commutation of service taking place at first; however, by the end of the thirteenth century this was so widely practiced that it seemed as if servile tenure would come to an end in a fairly short time and be replaced by the newer system of labors paid by wage. On this plane we can see that a villein's position must have risen when his labor had been commuted into money.

[1] Allsopp, Henry: An Introduction to English Industrial History
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A main characteristic of his position as villein was the uncertainty of his services; during those days he had to work for his lord, he could be put out to any kind of work and the number of days he had to serve was restricted only by the custom of the manor. But look at him after the commutation. There was more certainty now, more assurance. Money rents were paid by freemen or villeins, or serfs, and although rising from different sources, they were money rents, so , even though a serf in legal status, one's position was much more like that of a freeman. Here we glimpse the effect of the breakdown of the old system upon the classes. Greater liberation would surely come under these changes, not just for society as a whole but also for the individuals; upon them as human beings each living his life upon a plane of opportunity, not merely as a slave of one degree or another under a master of control or under laws of old tradition. By all means, the commutation of services was a cause conducive to freedom. It showed that the lords valued the money more than compulsory services. The villeins were really more like a class of renters than mere serfs. To be sure, their lord could still enforce his claims, payments, and restrictions from them as villeins, since they were still of that rank literally. But, actually, their position as those who paid him money was not so servile as when they performed his work as forced laborers. They were valued more as tenants now; others were to serve as laborers. Having this class below them, the villeins felt raised into partial freedom as if they were more worth the lord's consideration and favor than many of the mere laborers. In the second half of the fourteenth century, especially, there is said to have been rapid substitution of money for labor. The process continued through the fourteenth and

early fifteenth centuries until by the middle of the latter, enforcement of regular labor services was almost unknown. Although the work for the busy seasons of the year continued to be demanded longer than the week-work, even that was extremely unusual after the middle of the fifteenth century.

This change is said to have depended upon at least two outstanding conditions. One is the increased amount of money in circulation which we have already mentioned; the other, the increased number of free laborers available to be hired. These conditions were present more and more. Trade at fairs and markets and in towns was increasing during all the fourteenth century. Weaving and other handicrafts made more wealth and trade. Money from abroad which passed through the royal mints came into circulation and reached the hands of the villeins through sale of products or as payment for labor. Destruction of perhaps half of the population with the amount of money in the country remaining the same doubled the circulation per capita. Thus the way was paved for a possible increase in the use of money.

Another important change taking place during the fourteenth century and even more conducive really, perhaps, to freedom was the abondonment of demesne farming. We remember the demesne as one of the sections of the vill. From earlier times it had been customary for the lord to grant small portions of his own section of land to tenants at a money rent, but the demesne farm was the center of the agricultural system of the vill. Now, though, this was on many manors rented to a tenant or group of tenants. The earliest instances are at the beginning of the fourteenth century, but during the latter half of it labor

troubles made the process more usual and we are told that within one hundred years these demesne lands were practically all rented to tenants. We see that during the earlier Middle Ages lords had carried on the cultivation of those lands themselves under the administration of their officials and laborers making profit by getting a food supply for their own households or by selling surplus products. Now, they gave up their cultivation renting the lands out to someone, profiting by payment of money. Thus they became landlords of a modern type. Let us see how the relinquishment of the old demesne farms by the lords worked towards the destroying of serfdom. We know that the lords had valued serfdom because of its adequate and certain supply of labor furnished. The villeins were required to stay on the manor and provide labor for the cultivation of the demesne. But, if this was rented to one or several holders, the interest of the lord in the labor supply is lessened. He might even agree in his lease of this land that the villeins must perform their usual services still, but that new farmer could not enforce these, and what if the lord was languid or slow, or for some other reason would not bother to press it ? Other payments and burdens of serfdom were less lucrative and became less so as the villein class were depleted through extinction, and fewer inhabitants were bound to attend manor courts. Thus, gradually, it was more common and finally even universal for the lords not to enforce the requirements of serfdom, and it later became obsolete in England. Someone has said that by the middle of the fifteenth century "the mass of the English rural population were free men and no longers serfs." [1] Yes, the increasing use of money

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[1] Cheyney, E.P.: An Introduction to the Social and Industrial History of England P. 132

was destroying the old manorial system and would probably in time have undermined it even if nothing else had happened to it. But it alone would have taken hundreds of years. Something more was required to hasten the decay, and something more came,---sudden and effective.

The Black Death---The Changes Evolving

Some of the most conspicuous changes which became prominent in the century in which Chaucer lived gather around a series of attacks of a terrible epidemic of disease which raged in waves of pestilence over England from 1348 to 1350. Although Chaucer rarely mentions the Plague in his writings it was something which was felt deeply in his generation and which influenced the whole life of his day. This was the most violent attack in history of the Bubonic Plague. It ravaged town and country with its rapid progress with the individual and the community; its power of infection was great. Persons seized generally died within two or three days at the latest. Pestilence was frequent during the Middle Ages, but this attack was more destructive than any preceding one. When once introduced it became a scourge in subsequent times especially during the rest of the fourteenth century. Crowded, unhealthful, and unsanitary conditions and ways of living helped the disease to spread. The poor people crowded together in small and dirty houses suffered especially. The close arrangement of houses in the villages, crowded dwellings along narrow, dirty streets in towns, unwholesome food, the lack of vegetables, uncleanly habits of living universally prevalent, the promiscuous life in the monasteries and inns helped to sweep away a large part of the population. This pestilence strongly impressed men's

minds, and in records and literature of the contemporary times the great mortality has wide references. The victims often died within just a few hours. In the fourteenth century England with towns and villages insanitary, without doctors, with few hospitals and those of little use, this horrible plague spread quickly, very few recovering from the disease. "The fell mortality came upon them and the sudden and awful cruelty of death winnowed them." [1.] It has been estimated that more than half the population in the affected areas were taken; and that more than one-third of all the people in England were killed by it in a few months. Such a condition had far-reaching results, and such sudden and extensive destruction of life left its mark in many directions.

There were immediate results; the state of affairs was something like chaotic; ordinary local courts could not be held; lands had to be left untilled because there were so few people; harvests went unreaped and rotted in the field; cattle wandered around, broke down fences, and spoiled crops. Consider the effect of depopulation alone. One person in every three gone. We can hardly realize what an immense difference such a huge loss of population made to all classes of people. We might think of a village whose population was three hundred in the year of the plague. Taking into consideration a proportion of grown-ups of one hundred twenty, and the rest children, if the Black Death killed off one-third the villagers, there might be only eighty grown people left even counting the women as workers. Eighty people instead of a hundred and twenty. Yet as much corn

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1. Tickner, F. W.: A Social and Industrial History of England
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to be cut, harvested, threshed, and stored; as many cattle, sheep, pigs, and fowls to taken care of; as much corn to be ground even though there be no miller; as much land to be prepared for next year; as much to be done as before and more work, with fewer people. We can see what a complicated situation was present considered from various points of view, and that chaos might well describe the situation; we shall see it even more clearly, though. It must be seen that all of the work could not be taken care of; that a big part of the customary labor could not be given; there were not enough people. Corn had to rot in the fields; animals had to be uncared for; ruin seemed to have fallen upon the land as well as disease.

As we look closer we shall see that those laborers who survived demanded increased wages; that, laborers being so very scarce, agricultural wages went up about fifty per cent. The cost of different kinds of articles increased, especially those which involved much labor in their production, since scarcity of artisans had increased their wages too. Food prices also rose. Changes were made in every line. Monastaries because of depopulation were valued less in property, and their strictness and discipline was diminished. The great need for priests was one thing which led to the ordination of some who were not well-prepared or selected, who were inferior in education and moral calibre, and had its bearing somewhat on the deterioration of the clergy in this century, and the bitter feeling caused against them. Chaucer satirized the luxurious and rich yet empty living of religious leaders. The number of students was depleted at Oxford and Cambridge. The building of many churches and adornment was halted temporarily. Many towns lost not only

numbers but property that was never regained. The distribution of population through England was changed appreciably. Every field was affected. The whole standard of morality in the country was made lower. Even education, art, architecture suffered a decline. "A great social change was taking place which had been accelerated by this great pestilence, and new economic conditions had to be evolved to meet it." [1.] Someone has said that most far-reaching results were those connected with "rural life and the arrangement of classes." [2.] We spoke of immediate results but they are far-reaching, also. All the changes which took place were of great consequence in determining the bent of society, in making it find a new way of living.

Let us look at the manors and the effects upon them. The lords suffered greatly, although it might seem upon first thought that they gained. It is true that they did gain much land which came back to them because of the lack of heirs, and the extinction of families of free tenants, or because of the failure of descendants of villeins or cottars. They received, too, heriots collected on the death of tenants and fines paid by new tenants. But we have to look below the surface and what seems to be, to what really was the whole situation. These results were only temporary and casual; they were not the real results. In larger ways, the diminution of population was distinctly disadvantageous even to the lords. What if they did have more land ? What good was it without sufficient labor to work it ? Here was the new situation. Land had previously been wealth. Was it to continue as such ? Could the old system of

1. Tickner, F.W.: A Social and Industrial History of England
   P. 154
2. Tickner, F.W.: A Social and Industrial History of England
   P. 103

management continue ? Land without labor was useless. As to money, the payments made now for commuted services were cut so that they were too few to provide labor to replace the services; the quit-rents had been fixed when labor was plenty. At this time the situation was changed and could not be on the same basis. Labor and money were inter-dependent, and both were thus affected deeply. Rents, whether in money or kind, fell, for the supply of land greatly exceeded the demand now. The rents for mills and other monopolies were bound to be lower because there were fewer people to have grain ground, and the tenants of the mills could not make as much profit. Since the people were fewer and much land was unoccupied, rents and regular payments of various kinds made by free and villein tenants were appreciably less. The profits of the courts of the manors were less for there were not so many suitors to pay fees and to be fined. Successors of tenants were often children. In reviewing the situation we see what a hard blow the Plague gave the actual working of the various departments and the whole scheme of the old manorial system. The court records show the handicapped condition. Stewards complained constantly that certain land was "of no value because the tenants are all dead." [1] or "that a water-mill is worthless because all the tenants who used it are dead;" [1] that rents are much less than in the previous year, because "fourteen holdings consisting of one hundred two acres of land are in the hands of the lord;" [1] that the court fees have fallen from forty to five shillings "because the tenants there are dead," [1] But, most seriously of all, perhaps, it was as employers of labor that the lords suffered. The villein tenants recently came to be allowed to pay the value of the

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[1] Cheney, E.P.: An Introduction to the Social and Industrial History of England P. 104

required work in money; the men were hired, so that much of the work of the manor had come to be done by laborers for wages.

Looking at the situation from the viewpoint of the poorer on the manors, we see that they must pay the lord a portion of their produce still, give a certain number of days' labor each week and extra days at harvest, ploughing, or seed time. In a typical village possibly after the Plague, there might remain twenty-six villeins where before there were forty. For them it will not be necessary to cultivate as much land as before; they themselves have fewer mouths to feed; less corn will be needed. But what of the lord ? He will still require his customary portion. He knows there are fewer people but his demands are the laws of the system upon which the whole scheme of life has been based, upon which his very sustenance is established, and that of the subordinates' too. The manor which before had been accustomed to give him "fifty hens and six hundred forty eggs every year," [1] would still be required to pay him this even though only two-thirds of the people were left to keep fowls, now. Similarly, the manor accustomed to send ten bushels of corn must still send ten bushels of corn. "The custom of the manor was a set of hard rules which did not allow for the damage done by the plagues." [1]

Looking at the situation from the viewpoint of the freeholders we see that they were disadvantageously affected in that they needed to hire laborers, but were in a more favorable position in other ways. A threat to give up their holdings to go where better terms could be secured was usually effective in getting better terms where they were.

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1. Allsopp, Henry: An Introduction to English Industrial History P. 31

The villein holders did not legally have this opportunity but, practically, they did secure many of its advantages. Their payments and labor, either work or commutation, were valued much, so concessions were made accordingly. They frequently did take to flight giving up land and obtaining a grant elsewhere or becoming laborers without lands of their own. This class which depended entirely upon agricultural labor on the land of others was a class which had been increasing in numbers and which was most distinctly favored by the demand for laborers and the rise of wages. Here was the lord faced with something like bankruptcy. His wealth had consisted much in what labor he could command his villeins to do for him. Now, he could not get the customary amount of produce or of service, even though he demanded it in his sternest way. He was faced with even a greater difficulty, that of getting his own land, his demesne, cultivated. For we shall remember that he had always depended upon others to cultivate his own land for him. He was faced with serious difficulties both as to the continuation of the manor and as to his own preservation. What could he do under the conditions which were forced upon him, and under which he was so comparatively helpless even at best ? The land had to be tilled. Who would till it ? Certain lords found that if higher wages were offered, they could secure those who would do it. Others who had not heretofore paid for hired labor except rarely began to do so now. Still others tried force upon the villeins saying they were bound to perform the services according to the custom of the manor. Laborers were sought for eagerly. Because of the demand for them and their scarcity, those who were left were in a good position to do as they wanted. The villeins found that they were masters of the situation. The work simply must

be done or even food would fail, and the villeins were the only people to do it. It was the first time in English history that these, the agricultural workers, could say to the landlord, "give us what we wish and we will work for you." [1] And they could say more to show that they really were in control of the situation. They could and did say, in addition, "If you don't give us what we wish, we will go to some lord who will." [1] And he knew they would do it. He probably fined rebellious villeins heavily in the manorial court; or sometimes whipped and ill-treated those who refused him. But what was the good ? The result would be a loss. The villeins could pack up and be off with their families to other parts of the country, in spite of laws against vagrants. On some of the manors the villeins got together in union and went on a strike, refusing to gather in corn unless their demands were granted.

So we see the lords as a whole in a trying position. Their old authority and even the customs of the Ages was unable to hold. Whip, torture as they might, be cruel and relentless, their villeins just left them for something more to their desire. These people took advantage of the position they were in to demand more as individuals, and as groups; to refuse to work at the old accustomed rates. An ordinance of 1349 states: "because a great part of the people, especially of workmen and servants, have lately died in the pestilence, many, seeing the necessity of masters and great scarcity of servants, will not serve unless they may receive excessive wages." [1] A chronicler of the times says: "laborers were so elated and contentious that they did not pay any attention to the command

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[1] Cheney, E.P.: An Introduction to the Social and Industrial History of England P. 105

of the king, and if anybody wanted to hire them he was bound to pay them what they asked, and so he had his choice either to lose his harvest and crops or give in to the proud and covetous desires of the workmen."[1.] It was an unfortunate time for the lords. When even the tradition of the centuries was failing to hold, how could they, in their small way, expect to control ? Here was the rise in wages being demanded at the same time that many of the usual means and sources of income of the lords was cut off, and the expenses of carrying on largely increased. It is evident that the income of the lords was not increased but diminished, and that their position was less favorable than before the pestilence. All were affected seriously by the change taking place; it was a great social change and new conditions had to be evolved to meet it. The landlords found themselves with plenty of land, but in need of the labor and money if they were to continue farming for themselves through their officials.

Since they could not get what they required, many ceased to farm for themselves, and adopted one of two methods instead. The first was a "stock-and-land lease."[2.] If a lord could not get his land tilled, he might try this method. He handed it over to enterprising freemen or villeins on this lease by which the tenant was to possess a certain amount of land, some animals, some implements to hold freely for a limited number of years. Each year he was to pay rent to the landlord and at the end of the fixed time the land had to be returned in good conditions with the same number of animals and implements. Thus the tenants leasing the land were responsible for the labor,

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[1.] Cheney, E.P.: An Introduction to the Social and Industrial History of England P. 105

[2.] Allsopp, Henry: An Introduction to English Industrial History P. 32

relieving the lord of the perplexity of finding laborers enough to care for the land; and this scheme gave the landlord an assured annual income through the rent. Many were glad to accept these offers and to provide the labor, while the lord provided land, stock, and seed corn. Thus, an interesting change and development from the old plan to a new one more nearly like the modern tenant farming. The principle involved was a new one, The rents were not now those paid in quittance of services but "economic rents," [1] These farmers and smaller free-holders were to constitute an important class who proved to be the backbone of England in peace and in war for many years to come.

Another method could be adopted to meet the change in conditions. This way could not have been used to such advantage in the early days. However, with other conditions developing and with the broadening communication and trade came the growth of farming and trade in wool. The lord found that he could convert areas of surplus land into use through sheep runs. He could then dispense with the need of finding so many laborers, requiring only a few shepherds. Not only could his land be made useful, but profitable, for English wool was in great demand abroad. The number of sheep had been increasing for about a century before 1350, and there was more wool produced in the country than the people needed. English wool was of a very good quality because of climate which was suitable for its production. Much had been done to improve the English breed of sheep. Trade in wool increased steadily. In connection with this, we remember that Chaucer was rewarded with a sum of money for his apprehension of one who failed to pay his duty on wool.

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1. Allsopp, Henry: An Introduction to English Industrial History P. 155

This was while Chaucer was fulfilling his office as inspector, a position which gave him much opportunity for observation of life, and information he was to use later in portraying the life of his century so vividly. Landlords began to find sheep-farming profitable and popular. But previous to 1351 most of the sheep had been allowed to feed on the commonable waste, the moore, and heath as well as the demesne. Now, however, after 1351, lords who could not get their demesne lands cultivated began to use them for sheep runs; they began, too, to enclose some of the old commonable waste. By doing this they were saved from finding large numbers of workmen for ploughlands to finding only a few shepherds. This was an advantage for them.

But see the situation of the villeins who suffered by this enclosure movement; not only was there less demand for their labor, but there was less chance for them to produce food for themselves, since by enclosing the common pasture lands it was harder for the cattle and sheep of the villagers to find food.

See the perplexities when different classes were trying to adjust themselves and to find a suitable and profitable way of living. Throughout most of England there was great misery and distress, serious discontent, and a feeling of restlessness among people. We can see how the Black Death was largely an immediate cause of this because it contributed in various ways: "it had hastened the decay of the manorial system; it had compelled more landlords to grant and enabled more villeins to demand money-payments; it had caused both lords and villeins to break the rigid customs of the manors which for so long retarded progress; it had produced circumstances which made the manorial system no longer able to supply the needs of the

country now that it had a foreign trade in wool." [1] The manorial system decayed at a rapid rate now, and all the misery and poverty which accompanies rapid social changes of this kind were present, especially for the poorest classes. But there was a most important social result of the Black Death and the period of pestilence following: the general shock to the old settled life and the established relations of men to each other. To be sure "it introduced many immediate changes, and still more causes of ultimate change; but above all it altered the old stability, so that change in future would be easy." [2]

The Statutes of Labor--An Attempt to Hold to the Old Laws--Futility Because of New Conditions

Indeed, the laborers were taking advantage so much of their position, and were demanding so much that the lords tried to get the aid of Parliament to pass laws making the workers stay in their place, and not go beyond their bounds; to make them work as under the old conditions. But conditions themselves had changed. And the laborers were bound to change their place, too. It was absurd in this changing time for Parliament to try by mere laws or authority to enact that wages or people should remain fixed; "they might just as well have tried to stop the tides from ebbing and flowing by an act of Parliament." [3] However, it seemed imperative for the Government to interfere at the time.

Accordingly, an attempt was made. Parliament could not meet at this time because the Plague was raging in London. So it tried to meet the difficulty through a royal proclamation which

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1. Allsopp, Henry: An Introduction to English Industrial History P. 34
2. Cheyney, Edward P.: An Introduction to the Social and Industrial History of England P. 106
3. Allsopp, Henry,: An Introduction to English Industrial History P. 31

commanded anyone who had no other means of livelihood not to refuse to work for a person who offered customary wages paid in 1347 and the five or six preceding years, and prohibiting him from asking more. If any laborer whether a man or a woman, bond or free, should refuse any such offer of work, imprisonment was the fine. No one was to give or take higher wages than the old customary ones except under severe penalties. But it was obvious that it was impossible to live on the old wages when cost of living had increased so much; so an attempt was made to bring back prices of food and living to a level corresponding to the old wages which Parliament was trying to lay down. The great number of times it was necessary to re-enact these Statutes of Labor bear testimony to their futility; yet Parliament tried hard to enforce and enact through authority.

After the Royal Proclamation of 1349, word was sent, 1351, to the king that laborers were not obeying but were claiming double and treble that which they received previous to the pestilence. Then came the "First Statute of Laborers" which repeated the requirement to accept work offered, established rates of wages definitely for various classes of laborers, and required them to swear twice a year before officials to obey this law. If they refused to swear, or disobeyed the law, they were to be sentenced to stocks for three or more days, and then sent to the nearest jail until they would agree to do as required. Stocks were to be built in each village and judges were to visit the country twice a year to see to the enforcement of the law. But even those provisions and requirements did not bring the desired results. Parliament itself could not force these people to do as it demanded. Authority was not

obeyed in the old absolute way. In 1357, again the law was re-enacted with some changes. But this did not bring the results Parliament was seeking either; in 1361 there was still another re-enactment with more severe penalties for non-compliance. If laborers would not work except for higher wages than those established by law, they were to be imprisoned by lords for as many as fifteen days, and then sent to jail to await the coming of the justices. If any one should leave after accepting, he should be arrested and sued before justices. If he could not be found he should be outlawed and a writ sent to all the sheriffs in England to have him arrested, sent back, and imprisoned until he should pay his fine and make his amends to the injured party. "And besides for the falsity he shall be burnt in the forehead with an iron made and formed to this letter F in token of Falsity, if the party aggrieved shall ask for it." [1.] This was really more of a threat than a punishment. The statute was re-enacted with variations thirteen times after its introduction. This fact indicates that the general rise of wages was not prevented. We can see all the requirements and threats placed upon the people; yet these could not be enforced. The people were determined in a way of their own.

In fact, there was a conflict between an Act of Parliament and "a great economic law or principle, and the economic law triumphed over the clumsy contrivance of interested opponents." [2.] The inducement to the passage of these laws trying to prohibit

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1. Cheyney, Edward P.: An Introduction to the Social and Industrial History of England P. 108
2. Tickner, F. W.: A Social and Industrial History of England P. 153

a rise in wages was probably partly the "self-interest of the employing classes who were alone represented in Parliament, but partly also the feeling that the laboring classes were taking advantage of an abnormal condition of affairs to change the well established customary rates of remuneration of labor." [1] But prices had been rising even before the Plague, and old wages had not always been sufficient. Now, when the supply of labor could not meet the demand, wages were bound to rise, for the landlords evaded the Act and paid more to get work done. Men would roam the country as beggars rather than work under old rates. Some villeins escaped to towns where labor was much needed and after living there free from molestation of the overlord for a year and a day, gained their freedom. So legislation was directed strongly against laborers who broke agreements, against landlords who paid higher wages, against towns that harboured ranaways, and against those who refused to work. But legislation was in vain, it failed to accomplish the ends sought. In a changed condition, it could not bring back former ways of living, or former authority. It could not even enforce authority upon those accustomed to the rule of the old traditionary laws of the old manorial system; accustomed to be ruled as a subordinate class.

A most significant fact indicated by the laws was the existence of a distinct class of laborers. In earlier times, even when rural dwellers held land, it was different. Now, it is evident, there was an "increasing class who make their living

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[1] Cheyney, Edward P.: An Introduction to the Social and Industrial History of England P. 110

simply by working for wages."[1] Another important fact often referred to in the laws is the passing of laborers from one district to another. "It is evident that the population was becoming somewhat less stationary."[1] So we see that while in the period following the pestilence there were great difficulties and perplexities facing the lords of manors and employing classes, for the lower classes the same period was one of increasing opportunities and the breaking down of old restrictions and authorities which has been unquestioned before. It is hard to find any real effect the Statutes had in keeping the rate of wages lower than they would otherwise have become, but the efforts to enforce the law with the frequent punishments and penalties for individuals for violations, embittered the minds of the laborers, and helped to throw them into opposition to both the government and the upper classes in general. So it was that the "Statutes of Laborers" became one principal cause of the growth of hostility which culminated in the Peasants' Rebellion.

Heavy Taxes--An Added Cause to the Discontent--A Factor Leading Up to the Peasants' Revolt

There were various contributing causes leading up to this event. Social changes were taking place and bringing about misery and discontent in the readjustment. King Edward the Third glorified in warfare; he had determined to conquer France no matter what the cost. In spite of the changes and terrible troubles caused by the Black Death he continued to demand money. He taxed wool merchants heavily and induced all he could to pay him money so he could hire

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[1] Cheyney, Edward P. An Introduction to the Social Industrial History of England P. 110

soldiers to fight France. At the death of this vainglorious, showy king, England was seriously impoverished (1377) and the discontent especially among the poor was felt keenly and was becoming very evident. The spirit of restlessness and uneasiness was increased by numbers of idle roistering and even brutal soldiers who, returned to England after the French wars, were becoming wandering roving beggars. The country was very poor but even so, money must be found by Parliament and by King Richard the Second's guardians to govern it.

All the old ways of taxing had been tried, yet little money resulted. The kingdom seemed as if it would be bankrupt unless some means could be found. It finally seemed as if a way had been opened. Thus a new form of taxation was introduced- a general poll tax. Before this, taxes had been either direct, laid upon land and personal property, or indirect, laid upon various exports or imports. But in 1377 Parliament imposed a tax (of four pence a head) on all laymen. In spite of the results of this and the increased taxes of the old forms,more money still was needed for expenses of war. So in 1379, the rulers of England decided that every adult person should be called upon to pay money according to his means. Every effort was made to have this tax fair by making the rich pay more than the poor. Unfortunately the proceeds were far below the amount needed; therefore, in 1380 a third poll tax was laid. This was to be three groats from every person over fifteen years. If the richer people thought that the poorer had not paid their share formerly, this arrangment would make everyone pay. But even this time there was an attempt made toward fairness by the order for the wealthier in the township to help the poorer.

Thus if the total from a township averaged the designated sum per head, no pressing questions as to how much individuals had contributed would be asked. This might help the poor people in wealthy districts, but in the very poorest districts, the full amount would still be necessary, and the burden would press hard. Imagine, too, the weight on the villein with four or five unmarried daughters over fifteen. It was almost impossible for certain of the poor people to meet any such requirements. The collectors simply could not collect the full amount. Many people gave the wrong numbers for the members of their family. Evidently throughout not a little but a great part of the country people had tried to defraud their king. Of course the ministers of the king were angry at the results and in 1381 a fresh collection of this tax was ordered. The former collectors were not trusted this time, so commissioners were appointed to go all through the land to count the people for themselves and compare the numbers with the old list. "The result was astounding. In Norfolk 8000 persons, in Suffolk 13,000, had not been counted; and other counties were nearly as bad." [1] We can well imagine the anger not only of the officials who would discover fraud after fraud, but also the anger of the people who were found out and compelled to pay after all.

Indeed, the poll tax was extremely unpopular. There are several marked reasons we can understand for the feeling against these taxes, when we examine the situation. First of

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[1] Allsopp, Henry: An Introduction to English Industrial History P. 37

all, it was a new tax and seemed just like a new weight added to the already overburdened people, to contribute to the expenses which seemed never-ending. Moreover, this fell upon everybody, even the people who because of their lack of property had probably never been taxed before. Now, inhabitants of even every cottage were made to realize by the equivalent of several days' wages their public and political as well as private and economic burdens. And the method of assessing, itself, gave chance for much unfairness and favoritism. Then, too, there was misunderstanding. When the king suspected negligence and appointed new officials to investigate the former collection and enforce payment from those who had evaded it before, to many of the ignorant it seemed that a second tax was being imposed. The country was already full of discontent, and poverty, and real distress. The bitter feeling caused by the strict collection of the poll tax was really dangerous and emphasized the feeling of rebellion on the part of the people.

The Peasants' Revolt--New Spirit Shown in an Effort to Resist the Old Authority--Expression of Self-Assertion and Independence

This leads us to the time of the Peasants' Revolt in 1381. Is it anything to be surprised at when we consider all that was embittering the people ? There was a widespread restlessness among the masses especially during the latter part of the fourteenth century. Villeins were refusing to pay their customary services to the lords, and refusing to acknowledge the old requirements of serfdom. They were uniting to resist the efforts against them to collect dues and to force them to submit to decisions of

the courts. The reception given to religious preachings of the Lollards shows an attitude of independence and self-assertion which had been unthought of before by the people. There seems to have been a popular feeling reflecting a restlessness and questioning, with no particular plan of reform in mind, but showing, neverthless, great dissatisfaction with the world. There seem to have been appeals to revolt testifying to a propaganda of lawlessness.

Some of the causes of the rising discontent are already apparent. We have seen the continual friction between the employers and the employed class, from the efforts to enforce the "Statutes of Laborers." Class antagonism was created also and individual grievances were multiplied by Parliament's constant petitioning and re-enacting the Statutes, by the magistrates and special officials who enforced the laws, the landowners who appealed for help and relief in dealing with their workers and in securing demands from them. Also, the very improvement in the condition of the lower classes which really was in progress made them more impatient than ever of the remaining burdens which still pressed upon them. Then,too, the teaching of a certain character which was prevalent was a cause of much unrest. Communism was preached by a wandering priest, John Ball, and the injustice of property-holding classes was only a natural inference from teachings of Wycliffe and the "poor priests" [1.] about whom we shall hear more. There was corruption of the court, incapacity of ministers, and failure

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1. Jusserand, J.J.: A Literary History of the English People
   P. 55

of war which also made for agitation. Change was making itself felt. It was shaking society; the older condition of things was passing out. Wycliffe seemed to make an attack upon the existing orders of society. The Statutes seemed to be directed against the poor by the rich. People's attention was called to the ills of the time and their eyes were being opened towards more independence and freedom. The way they took, just then, to find it was by revolt.

How significant the fact that they had reached the point where they dared to stand up and revolt. Once, they would never have done this. But now, see what happened. When the commissors were sent through the country to find a better yield of the tax, their rough methods proved to be the last straw, and one of the king's men in Essex was driven away violently by the people, who refused to pay another penny. When the official ordered the spokesman of the mob to be seized, the crowd began to throw stones and chase away the chief commissioner with his assistants. Essex men were roused by messengers and when, later, the judge who had been ordered to deal with the rioters and punish them appeared, an army of angry men rushed upon him and terrified him, making him swear never to judge such cases again. They beat and beheaded his clerks and men who were with him.

Rioting began simultaneously in different parts of England. Several thousand men from Kent began to attack towns; they seized villagers on the way to Canterbury and forced them to take oaths resisting any kind of tax except the old ones, promising to be loyal to "King Richard and the Commons,"[1] to

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1. Cheyney, Edward P.: An Introduction to the Social and Industrial History of England P. 114

join their party when called upon, (and never to sanction John of Gaunt's becoming King). It was John of Gaunt who was a friend and patron of Chaucer and who had some influence upon certain work of Chaucer's. The two were strong friends through life. John of Gaunt showed much favor to Chaucer, and Chaucer ran the risk of bitter feeling for the sake of standing by his friend. Rochester and Maidstone were reached where a leader, Wat Tyler, was chosen, one who seems to have been an Essex man and a soldier in the French wars. He was a good talker, sharp-witted, and quick to act, and soon gained the confidence of the wild multitude following him, His army, with many poor and ragged men armed with hatchets, scythes, sticks, old swords or bows and arrows, captured Canterbury. Here they overran the archbishop's palace, and beheaded three citizens who were "traitors."

Soon the army was joined by the famous "mad priest of Kent,"[1] John Ball, a spokesman of the revolutionary teachings. This man had been in prison several times for preaching against bishops and the Pope, and it was at Canterbury at the capture of the archbishop's palace that he had been released. He was an eloquent preacher, and his manner and style appealed strongly to the poorer classes. Crowds gathered about him in the cloisters of Canterbury Cathedral and many of the poor people loved him. While inside was the shrine of St. Thomas à Becket, the goal of more than one medieval pilgrimage, outside, the voice of the modern world seemed to be speaking. It said such things as these: "Why do we deserve this, and why should we be kept in servage ?

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[1] Cheyney, E. P.: And Introduction to the Social and Industrial History of England P. 39

Some people are dressed in velvet, but we are dressed in poor cloth. Some people live in fair houses while we have pain and travail. Some live in luxury while we have to weather the wind and rain." Ball's reachings were socialistic; they declared that everything should be common. Many others who did not go this far with him shared his democratic feeling and were in sympathy with his demand for a social reform. He attacked the wealth of the Church; he believed the Church was ruled by wicked men who cared only about wealth and luxury. He believed there should be no distinction between the rich and the poor, and his preaching was devoted to hastening the time when this would be true. It is said that he was a man with "a passionate sense of justice." [1.] He was deeply religious and hated poverty and misery; his heart was filled with sympathy for the poor and oppressed. Maybe his methods of preaching or of removing the sorrow and misery were not the wisest; but he was sincere, and a good man.

Insurgents set out towards London wishing to get access to the young king and directed somewhat by an instinctive desire to strike at the capital of the kingdom. A rendezvous was formed at Blackheath, about five miles from the city. Courage and daring was increasing. Eloquent John Ball helped this spirit to grow by the sermon he preached to the discontented crowd, as he talked of the equality of men in the beginning. Therefore he declared it was not God's will for certain men like the wicked judges, bishops, or lords to be rich and powerful while others were wretched and poor. How the multitude must have been spurred on to strike when this preacher told them here was a chance to

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1. Allsopp, Henry: An Introduction to English Industrial History
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fight not merely for their own will, though it was, but for God's will to make all men equal by striking down the rich and powerful. With this for a motive, there was an opportunity for an appeal to many more because of their duty to God. This gave an excuse for a higher level of performance. The eager crowd shouted for joy at the words of John Ball and declared he should be their archbishop, their chancellor. It was soon after this that Tyler led his army to London Bridge which was open to them by means of plans with some London sympathizers. As various groups of rebels entered the city of London and passed along the roads, some of the villagers joined the throng, especially some of the lower classes. Houses of the gentry were sometimes burned, or homes of great ecclesiastics; tax and court rolls and documents were destroyed and persons connected with the law were put to death.

At first, Tyler wanted only to capture and punish the Duke of Lancaster, the Archbishop, and the Treasurer. Way was made to the duke's palace which was burned. The men were ordered not to plunder the rich and beautiful contents for themselves. One man caught stealing a goblet was hanged immediately as a warning that vengeance and justice, not plunder or riches, were to be the aims of the rebels. But the army contained many who knew very little and cared much less about discipline or justice. Many were loafers, brutal soldiers who had lived lives of plunder, vice, and beggar's lives. Others were ready to help create disturbance, especially if they could get something out of it. Many made themselves drunk from wine they took from cellars and were really dangerous, furious robbers. After the ransacking of the Savoy Palace, the army went to the Temple where the hated lawyers lived. This place they pillaged and burned. Some lawyers were caught and killed. Most of the city,

finally, was in the hands of the crowd. From the Tower of London the king with his frightened advisers could see blazing buildings and hear screams and shouting.

The king pondered what the safest thing to do was--if there were any safe thing to do. Would it be a good time now to attack the rebels, right away, when they might be worn out with plundering ? There seemed to be no preparation, no plan, nor organization with which to go against them. Would it be wiser to try to win over the leaders by promises ? Night-time was a poor time to attack. And more than this, too, many of the Londoners themselves, it was feared, were to be counted in the lines of the rebels. Thus it was decided the king should later meet the rebels at Mile End. A meeting with the king was exactly what Tyler and other leaders had wanted. They had set out to find the king. The fact is that the best men of the rioting group were so convinced of the justice of their demands and had thought so much about it in their earnestness that they had come to feel the king would somehow be convinced, likewise, and would be their friend, even their leader who would take their viewpoint and aid them to victory, if they could only see him face to face without lords, bishops, and lawyers as go-betweens,--- if they could only see him and tell him their story fairly. So they felt that their king would gladly help them rid the land of those wicked ones who impoverished it in his name. Soon the king himself and Tyler were face to face. Here was the moment Tyler had longed for, and here he spoke eloquently of the grievances of the poor people; and in his demands we can see clearly some of the main causes of the unrest and discontent which culminated in the Rebellion. He demanded that the king do away with serfdom; that he abolish all labor services to

make it easy for each villein to pay money rent for lands; that the king make all markets free so the people would have freedom in buying and selling as they desired without heavy market-tolls or elaborate market-laws to conform to. He dared even to ask pardons, for all who had taken part in this great revolt. What did the king do with all these demands ? In the face of this mob of rioters he complied with their desires; all, he promised to fulfill. He ordered clerks to write pardons and soon thousands of believing peasants were on their homeward way thinking all was to be well, and that they had gained all they fought for.

Perhaps Wat Tyler gained boldness with his apparent success. At least, he pressed the king with a long list of famous men that the rebels wanted to punish. The king, not promising them, a group led by Tyler went after these men to the Tower while the king and his officials were issuing charters. They ransacked the rooms, seized the Archbishop of Canterbury, the Lord Treasurer and other officials who were beheaded after cruel and brutal murder. These acts incited the rioters even more and wild scenes took place. The London mob led men to seek unpopular persons. Many foreigners were murdered, probably by Londoners or by the Insurgents at the instigation of the former, and scores of Englishmen, especially lawyers and known supporters of the Duke of Lancaster whom they felt were so much against them. Many houses were plundered and fired; and, sad to say, hundreds of innocent people were maltreated. The culmination of the revolt took place at the time of the execution of the ministers.

In terror the king was urged to meet Tyler once more. Tyler at once began to make more demands. Evidently there was a confusion of ideas; the leaders did not really know what they

actually wanted to demand or how to express their wants. And "it was quite impossible for the king or any one else, even if he had been as wise as Solomon and as powerful as Alexander the Great, to do any of the things he was now asked to do. No ruler can make a new heaven and a new earth by merely saying 'let it be so'." [1] Tyler was not satisfied with the king's expression to do all he could, and there was trouble between some of the king's attendants and Tyler, who was finally stabbed to death. It was a dangerous moment for the king and for his followers; there was intense anger on the part of the leaderless rebels, but the king's pretence that he would be chief and captain appealed to the group and captured their confidence when they remembered the justice of their cause and how they had believed the king would lead them to victory. So they were held down until armed forces were brought against them and they were disarmed and ordered to their homes.

The downfall of Tyler and the dispersion turned the tide of the revolt. When those who had strong faith in their cause, in different districts, heard the news of the failure, it dampened their own hopes of success. The revolt had already been losing rather than gaining strength and unity, and now the leaders lost heart. On the other side, local groups took courage to surpress revolt in their localities. "Villeins ye shall remain! " [2] said the king who with his leaders acted, now. Two days after Tyler's death a proclamation forbade unauthorized gatherings; another, very soon, required tenants, villeins, and free-

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1. Allsopp, Henry: An Introduction to English Industrial History P. 45
2. Allsopp, Henry: An Introduction to English Industrial History P. 47

men all to perform their services to their lords. Still another withdrew pardons and manumissions granted previously. Special sessions of the court were called in the rebellious sections, and an attempt was made to search out leaders of the revolt and execute them.

As to the objects sought by the Rebellion, there seemed not to have been any general political object except opposition to the new burdensome taxation, and disgust with the ministry existing. Nor was there primarily a religious object, as such, in view. A large part of the disorder had no definite planned-out purpose whatever, but consisted of an attempt to settle by violence disputes and grievances, at a time when there was confusion and relaxation of the law. Really, this was the culmination of their pent-up feeling against the injustice of oppression and limitation forced upon them, and it was a strong exhibition of their growing feeling of the right to be free which was ultimately to end in this right in spite of the words of the king who was to finally be useless in enforcing his command "villeins ye shall remain!"[1] Some of the objects of the rioters would be classed as economic. They made a general effort to destroy the rolls of the manor courts. There was a reason for this. These were the record of the burdens and payments and disabilities of the villagers; they were kept perhaps in manor houses, in castles of great lords, or in monasteries. Previous transactions or payments of heriot, relief, fines, acknowledgements of serfdom, obtaining land on burdensome conditions were all recorded here, and could be produced to prove customs of the manor to the disadvantage of many a tenant.

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[1] Allsopp, Henry: An Introduction to English Industrial History P. 47

If these records could only be destroyed, the villeins might expect they could claim to be practically owners of the houses and acres they and their ancestors had held through time; and all this, without having to make payment and reservations which the rolls would testify were necessary.

The insurgents demanded more satisfactory relations with their lords. Protests were made against the tolls on sales and purchases, and against attendance at manorial courts, and maximum limit to the rent of land was asked for. One of the objects of the rebels was, without doubt, the removal of the burdens of serfdom, and the initiative and spirit carried over to places where serfdom did not exist. John Ball's sermon at Blackheath was charged with the servitude of the peasantry. Its abolition was demanded here and there; charters of emancipation as the king gave them claimed to make "free from all bondage." [1] But the object sought did not generally result, at least, at once. However, the impulse was to bring far-reaching results. They, in connection with this rising are to be looked for in giving greater rapidity and definite direction to changes already in progress rather than merely in starting a new movement or way of life immediately, as the rioters demanded. Important changes often do take place slowly and sometimes by almost imperceptible growth. So, altho some tell us the immediate result of the insurrection was failure, it did hasten the decay of a land system which was coming to be unsound economically, and would in time probably have died out anyway. The manorial courts began to fall into decay, and the older obligations of the old manorial system began to be disregarded freely. So, serfdom decayed in fact

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1. Cheyney, Edward P.: An Introduction to the Social and Industrial History of England P. 124

if not in law, and villeins came to be holders farming the land of the country. Serfs did not cease to exist on royal manors until Elizabeth's reign, but serfdom had decayed greatly long before this time in fact. But for us who are glimpsing the changing atmosphere, this Revolt is significant showing the demands the people dared to stand up and make. It is valuable in portraying for us the restlessness with the old order of things and the independence growing in the people in their moves toward greater freedom. The day when the new-born liberty for the individual was to reign was being invoked, and was to be realized eventually.

The Towns--Development Beyond Narrow Old-World Boundaries

Actual conditions were helping by creating developments which were pushing beyond the narrow old-world boundaries. This fact is illustrated by the growth of towns and the stimulus furnished by broadening communication. We have already said that a characteristic of the fourteenth century was the breakdown of the old manorial system. The development of towns had a part in this breakdown sometimes. Even in the thirteenth century there were towns distinguished by size, form of government, and occupations from rural agricultural villages. In the next century the state of affairs moved on still further. The towns differed widely in their form of government, but all had charters from the king or some nobleman, abbey, or bishopric on whose lands they had grown up. Some of the towns were first manorial villages. Perhaps, as time went on and changes came, certain of these were situated at a ford, or over a river, or at the crossing of roads in some place which gave importance to them as centers about which people from other manors might gather to sell and buy. If a village was to be a market, rules would have to be followed

to make the business fair. Such market-laws would tend to make the place of much more importance as a village rather than a mere manorial village would make it. But the lord would feel that this was his manor, so his market. He would feel that people from other manors had no right to benefit by his manor unless they paid him for it. So he demanded market-tolls. He must appoint officials to collect his rights. On the other hand the villagers would need officials to keep things straight on their side; to balance things with the collectors and with the other people who came to buy; to see that no more was collected than was due. Thus, an organization was created and a closer cooperation was necessary both on the lord's side and on the villager's side, when a village came to be a market. It became bigger and often more prosperous; the people were somehow closer together for a common good. The townsmen in such a village grown on the lands of a manor might still go on cultivating on strips in open fields, or pasturing cattle, or even performing labor services. But on market days the inhabitants were more than mere tenants of a manor; they were townsmen.

More and more there was to be developing among them men whose living depended less on land and more on occupations like those of the carter, the miller, the carpenter, the tailor, the leather-maker. At market-center these men would be especially needed if only for repairs. And we are to see, later, how important the development of occupations was not only in increasing the growth of towns in numbers, but in directing and ruling the life of them, and finally in enlarging their sphere. There were sometimes reasons other than just a convenient location at a ford or by cross-roads which determined the center

of a market town; in some cases the combination of factors. Sometimes a castle of a powerful lord who could protect the market from raids of neighboring people lent its favorable influence; or a monastery which not only would need to buy and sell much produce itself, but would, by its presence, give security and prestige. At other times, though, the presence of a great fortress was disadvantageous. For, too often, whether churchman or not, the lord was unfair in his dealings with the townsmen, and if he had power behind him could make things very prosperous for himself at the cost of the people in the town. He might plunder the market, charge excessive tolls or unjust fines; or even refuse to allow a market some year as a punishment. So the townspeople sought for some way to gain their own control over the market without interference. If they could make it profitable to the lord to give it up, all would be well, they thought. They could do it by paying him every year a sum of money to compensate him for the tolls and dues he would otherwise receive. Then, if they could strike an agreement with him, they would in return demand for this annual payment a charter on which was written the agreement between the lord and the townsfolk. If the people had only the king to bargain with it was easier especially if the king needed money badly, since he would more likely be ready to give a charter in return for an annual sum of money. Some gained the right to regulate their trade and to be free from many vexatious tolls, as well as the right to govern themselves. However, if several overlords along with the king had to be bought off, it was often more difficult to arrange. Sometimes the lords hung on desparately, refusing to sell their rights over towns only when there was no other means left of

raising money. The Crusades helped the cause of the towns, for the lords would often gladly sell their rights over the towns in order to go on a Crusade to the Holy Land. But, it frequently happened that a lord absolutely refused to sell his profitable rights. In some cases especially if they were abbots they would not allow their towns self-government, or would not grant full charters. It was for this reason that during the riots of 1381 the monasteries at Bury St. Edmunds and St. Albans were ruthlessly attacked and plundered with a vengeance. But the majority of English towns had charters long before that. Towns were becoming large and prosperous.

The Gilds--Meeting a Need Created by Situations Which Gave More Control and Responsibility to the People at Large.

After the towns received their charters, the question was how they with their markets were to be managed. It was a serious problem. The townsmen, so far, were organized for hardly anything more than purposes of warfare and law-courts; but as towns grew and prospered, and as trade developed and people became more dependent upon things they made such as clothing, tools, weapons, or ornaments, there was a need of better organization to regulate trade which came to be so important a part of the means of life in the town. Officers would be needed to see that there was no fraud in quality or quantity of goods; to arrange details of buying and selling; to have charge of the tolls and fines. Something was needed to represent and protect them and their interests as inhabitants of their town against the inhabitants of other towns.

So, as population and trade increased we find organizations for trade regulation in the towns. The association was the Merchant-Gild. Membership was obtained only by paying a fee.

Such an association was an advantage to the members because it allowed no one outside the members of the gild to sell anything except perhaps some food, without payment of heavy tolls and fees. But the members of the gild could sell freely. The society was a protection and it furnished aid for its members in times of need in sickness or sorrow, and care of children and widows. The Merchant-Gild was also beneficial to the buyers, for by its rules carpenters, masons, weavers or others were prohibited from raising prices or lowering quality; they were made to deal fairly. The officials fixed prices and qualities of all kinds of goods, and compelled everyone to sell openly. These chiefs of the society were to the trade of the town what the aldermen were to the law and order of the town. Both groups were often from the richest and ablest and most influential. In fact it often happened that the same man would serve both capacities. This fact caused trouble later since too much power was sometimes put into the hands of certain people or groups. The Merchant-Gild was an association including the men of all different businesses, and its officials formed the body which represented the town when the traders came from other towns, just as the aldermen and town officials formed the body representing the town when the king's tax collector or judge came. They entered into alliances with gilds of different towns, and agreed to give certain rights of buying and selling free of tolls to gildsmen of other towns on condition that their own members received similar favor when they travelled.

But the increase in population meant more trades and subdivisions into special lines. Because of the increase in foreign trade, there was an altogether new class of men coming into existence; this was the dealer in goods. Craftsmen had made

goods which they sold to the one who would use them; but the trader was coming now to be more common. He bought up goods he had not even helped to make and sold it elsewhere, perhaps even in a foreign land. It is the craftsmen we are to look at just now, though. As the workers increased there were more for each particular craft and it was harder to supervise the work and prices of such wide work and conditions. It was easier, in the crowd, for non-gild members to get customers, and to avoid the fees or tolls they should pay. The Merchant-Gild which included all trades could not cope sufficiently with the problems of each separate craft in the growing complexity of productions. So it was, there grew up because of the need, Craft-Gilds. Each craft, now, could have more attention on problems all its own. Buying and selling was regulated; prices were fixed; friendly benefits of the society were given. These are the gilds which in the fourteenth century were crowding out the old Merchant-Gilds because of changing conditions and new demands. Chaucer in his Canterbury Tales has representatives from London such as a haberdasher, a carpenter, a dyer, a weaver, and a cook; from the country, a ploughman, and a miller. The merchant, with forked beard and Flaundrish beaver hat discourses in a learned way about taxes, and ship-money, and was drawn, doubtless, from an original class. Several of Chaucer's characters belonged to the type in the gilds which were so famous in London and

> "Were with us eek, clothed in O liveree, 1.
> Of a solempne and greet fraternitee."

Of importance were the wool-workers and their various branches; also, the group of workers in metals; and the wood-workers.

While each craft was more or less independent of the other,

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1. Skeat, W.W.: The Student's Chaucer P. 423, Lines 363-364

all were to some extent under the control of the town authorities, the mayor and alderman who might likely also be wardens or chief officials of the various gilds. It was this fact which helped to bring the downfall of the system. It was well and good for the officials of the gild to have power to regulate trade for the interest of the town but it was easy for them to get too much power within their hands as officials of the town as well as of the gild. Then there was temptation to profit individually from the power vested in them; many did use their positions to amass wealth for themselves.

This was going on at the same time another process was, which sooner or later would tend to break the gild system. When trade grew steadily and craftsmen required more helpers, they took apprentices some of whom themselves came to be craftsmen and joined the gild. However, many could not join for one reason or another; some were too poor; others were excluded by gildsmen who wanted to keep the membership as low as possible. So, the new class of workers developed, the day-laborers, the dependent wage-earners who were forced to live by selling their labor, and were unable themselves to become independent craftsmen. Some have called this the "birth of Capitalism" [1] but others prefer to say it was the beginning of a "money relationship between employer and employed." [1] Before the towns had developed so, the craftsman could be his own master and receive all his profit from his own work, but life became much more complex with the growth of towns, and population increased there, so it was necessary more and more for much of the population to engage in producing commodities both for themselves and for the other part

[1] Allsopp, Henry: An Introduction to English Industrial History P. 73

of the community to use; things were needed. So some men had to lose the full profit of their labor and work for hire. It was partly the discontent of these men which made the Great Revolt of 1381 so fierce. They hated the gildsmen, because they saw that the richer the gilds became the poorer they themselves were; so they banded together and helped to organize rebellion.

There were, too, in many of the towns certain unskilled workers who could never belong to a gild. They had no very definite occupation, and they lived rather poor lives. The Great Revolt showed a sudden rising of many of these poor classes. We see that though the gild did serve in its time many useful needs, it came to be unsatisfactory. One reason was that it absorbed so much of the wealth of the town. At times, because of this, it was impossible for the mayor and officials to carry out the laws properly about behavior, sanitation, and housing. Then, too, the wealth became concentrated in the hands of only a few in each gild, and so led to the exploitation of a majority of the people of the town by these few. These associations did last on until the end of the seventeenth century, but they were most successful, we are told, in the fourteenth century; and after that even if slowly, they surely decayed with the growth of population, trade, and the use of money. We see the towns almost ceasing to be concerned with agriculture, depending on the country for food-stuffs, while the country depends on the town more for supplies such as boots, clothes, and money. This led to inter-change on a larger scale, local, national and international.

Trade--Its Stimulus to Wider Contact and Knowledge--Its Contribution to the Desire For and Means of Greater Independence

Towns which began as "self-contained, self-sufficient" [1] com-

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[1] Allsopp, Henry: An Introduction to English Industrial History P. 76

munities began to seek the trade of other towns and peoples and tried to strike agreements of trade with them. In fact the changes taking place in trade and commerce were having an effect upon the growth of town life, making possible new contacts, new ideas, and greater enterprise.

Although the feeling of some of the English merchants had been one of keen dislike to foreigners and a desire to restrict trade within rather narrow limits, they were to recognize soon the value of a larger intercourse. Shipping became of great importance and the control of the sea important in the interests of England and her continental trade. Chaucer gives us a picture of one who sailed the sea, knowing every creek from Scotland to Spain, and encountering many a storm. .

"With many a tempest had his berd been shake." [1]

From the fourteenth century the English are found either singly or in small bands on all the seas and highways. "They travaile in every londe..........the island no longer suffices them as it sufficed the Anglo-Saxons.......he knows nothing who stirs not out," [2] they believed. "They roam over all lands." [3] They liked to tell about the wonders they had seen and the knowledge gained. We can see how travel and trade stimulated exchange of thought and feeling and some writing of books. "They are themselves, and no longer seek to be any one else." [3] This latter expression is typical of the growing tendency toward nationalism. Under Edward the Third commercial policy took on an international aspect. Wars were entered in order to save

[1] Skeat, W.W.: The Student's Chaucer P. 424, Line 406

[2] Jusserand, J.J.: A Literary History of the English People P. 257

[3] Jusserand, J.J.: A Literary History of the English People P. 258

trading associations. The First Navigation Act fostered shipping by prohibiting carrying merchandise in or out of England unless in English ships or those belonging to the nation the goods belonged to. Edward the Third helped to encourage trade, too, by his treatment of alien workers and merchants. He promised royal protection to skilled alien workers, in spite of the jealousy of the townspeople towards outsiders. In 1331 Edward the Third invited Flemish weavers to settle in England to teach wool exporters to manufacture cloth, thus to increase the commercial value of the English export trade. Edward the First helped towards freedom of trade and safe conduct to merchants by the Carta Mercatoria.

Although there were difficulties to hamper the prospering of trade, whenever possible the king and the classes most influential in the national government, the nobility and the churchmen, showed their attitude which was favorable toward foreign trade. At different times series of privileges and guarantees were issued to foreign merchants or towns to encourage their coming to England to trade. Perhaps the most outstanding instance was the Carta Mercatoria already mentioned above. It was given "for peace and security of merchants coming to England from Germany, France, Spain, Portugal, Navarre, Lombardy, Tuscany, Provence, Catalonia, Aquitaine, Toulouse, Quercy, Flanders, Brabant, and all other foreign lands." [1] It gave the merchants the right to come in and sell almost any kind of goods without paying many tolls sometimes enacted in the towns. They could sell to strangers as well as townsmen, and could retail as well

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1. Cheyney, Edward P.: An Introduction to the Social and Industrial History of England P. 82

as wholesale. They were freed, too, through this privilege from other requirements such as living while there under the roof of a native merchant, and staying only a certain number of days. Town and market authorities, according to the plan, were to give prompt justice to foreigners, and a royal judge would hear appeals. If this charter could have been enforced more largely sooner, some of the customs of the merchants with their jealousy would have been overcome in shorter time and trade would have expanded more rapidly. But at first there was some resistance on the part of native merchants, and the position of the foreign traders was supported, then, by the crown largely. Indeed the foreign trade of England seems to have been carried along by the efforts and interests of the foreigners themselves, especially, in the beginning. They had enterprise. "From Flemish, French, German, Italian and even Spanish cities merchants came over as traders." 1. There were real difficulties which hindered the prosperity of England's early trade; there were difficulties of transport; municipal restrictions; coinage troubles; some dangers by land and sea. Quite serious was the fact that with the growing export of wool, foreign money of inferior quality was coming into the country and driving abroad English money that had been of good standard and weight. Edward the Third tried to check this by introducing a gold coinage beside the silver one, but was not very successful. He lessened the weight of both gold and silver coins without harming the percentage of precious metal they contained. He tried to make them nearer in value to the foreign coins corresponding so as to prevent the exporting of English coins. But there was much dissatisfaction and the increased prices that

1. Cheyney, Edward P.: An Introduction to the Social and Industrial History of England P. 83

followed the lessened value of the coins were one cause of the rise in wages of the years just before the Black Death.

However, in spite of all the drawbacks, trade increased and industries developed. Things were carefully regulated and protected. Gain was ensured by collection of revenue which depended upon articles of export and import. The imports consisted of such things as French wines and fruits: Flemish fine woolen cloth, linens, cambrics, tapestries, armour and weapons; Baltic hemp, flax, timber, fur, and fish and annually from Venice, silks, cottons, perfumes, dyes, pearls, precious stones, spices of the East. Export was mainly in the staples, wool, leather, tin and lead in which England had a monopoly at this time. Though exports were mainly raw materials, manufactures were developing within the country. England was producing the best wool in Europe. The Flemings did get some wool from Spain but even then they found it necessary to mix it with English wool to make good cloth. The fostering of the immigrant artisan helped develop the production more widely of English cloth. The customs showed increase in the use of cloth and the finishing of cloth, and development of making it better is shown more and more. By the fourteenth century, cloth trade had spread; London was an important center of the industry. English workers were renowned for skill in metal-work. Religious houses, cathedrals, and churches demanded this work. England was famous as a country of bells, and gold and silver plate was common in the houses of the merchants. By fourteen hundred, the coal trade was assuming worthwhile dimensions. Iron was worked even during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. Later there was iron smelting in many parts of England; charcoal was the fuel used. Lead was being mined; tin, also, mined and exported.

The great commercial houses and the merchant corporations were powers in this century. Edward the Third granted to London gilds the right of electing members to Parliament (and they preserved this right until the Reform Bill 1832) Wealthy merchants lent money to the king; they were his councils, and behaved as great citizens. One lent Edward the Third eleven thousand seven hundred twenty pounds; John Blanket of Bristol had enormous wealth before long and at death left some to the poor; a grocer of London soon embarked to fight for the kingdom; certain wool-merchants mortgaged their property for the king; another rescued Edward the Third detained in Flanders by want of money. Merchants are ennobled, and earls and dukes spring from their stock. Their strength was increasing towards greater power and place in the history of their England.

Closer Participation in General Life of Europe--The Decline of Chivalry--The Breakdown of the Old Medieval Class--Trend Towards Changed Classes of Society and Newer Methods

The Hundred Years' War in 1337 between England and France brought England for the next century into close connection with the rest of Europe. It was during this war that England won three of the most brilliant military victories in her history, Grecy, Poitiers, and Agincourt. The many alliances, embassies, and exchanges of visits, and various international intercourse which the prosecution of this war involved could not help bringing England into "closer participation in the general life of Europe than ever before, and it caused the ebb and flow of a tide of influences between England and the Continent which deeply affected economic, political, and religious life on both sides of the Channel." [1]

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[1] Cheyney, Edward P.: An Introduction to the Social and Industrial History of England P. 97

In speaking of war and the widening influence of it we are reminded of the changes in warfare, and of the decline of chivalry. For although knighthood had displayed brilliant scenes, we are to see that its foundation was shaken and its splendor was near an end. We know that the basis of feudal society in the Middle Ages was military, essentially. The overlords were paid for the lands held of them partly by personal services in time of war. Leaders of nations were warlike and fighting was the chief object of their lives in war and in peace. Success in battle depended upon the valor of a leader rather than his skill in disposition and use of his soldiers. Armoured horsemen were an important element in every contest. Chaucer makes use of the knight in his Canterbury Tales. But, although he takes a character from medieval society, his manner of telling his story is far beyond the standard of medieval days. Chivalry was a very important medieval institution among the warriors. Its laws and customs became the guides of conduct for gentlemen's lives. It included their attitude towards war, religion, and also woman. The basis of action was service with the sanction of honour and religion. Every boy of "gentle birth" [1] looked forward eagerly to becoming a knight. It was the reward of valor and a passport to equality with other knights.

The armour of the knight varied according to the Age in which he lived, but there was always a covering of metal which left him nearly invincible. We are told that few knights were killed in battle. Their worst danger was that of being thrown from their horses and trampled upon or stifled; for it was hard, full-armoured, for a knight to rise quickly if he was on the ground.

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[1] Tickner, F.W.: A Social and Industrial History of England P. 120

It was these armoured knights with their squires who assisted and men-at-arms who made up the backbone of medieval armies.

But this system was to see its downfall. New methods were coming in warfare as well as in other departments of life. These new methods were putting an end to the knight with full armour who had been in previous days all-powerful in war. Companies of armoured knights mounted upon war-horses had usually been able to sweep any infantry from the field. However, the fourteenth century shows a change taking place here. The archer, despised though he may have been before, was coming forth. A base-born proves a match for the knight. Long and cross-bow oppose the lance and the sword, and missile weapons gain a footing. The archer finds the joints a vulnerable spot, even though other parts of the armour may keep out the arrow. He too, finds he can stop the career of the knight by bringing his horse down, thus placing the knight in unfavorable circumstances, dismounted, so that he cannot cope with quick-moving, light-armed troops. At Crecy, that great victory, the archers were effective. The decline of chivalry was made more rapid and complete by the introduction of gunpowder which revolutionized the method of attack. The decline is shown in the knights being replaced by hired men-at-arms, or mercenary soldiers. When the fundamentals of medieval society were modified, accompanying changes were bound to come. The decline of chivalry is the expression of the downfall of an institution which was grounded upon medieval conditions but which was not to hold with the transformation of the modern.

Parliament-Growth of Power and Influence that Was to Hold and Develop

A new power unable to be fully controlled by the king was

rising. Although Parliament was in an embryonic state at the end of the thirteenth century, by the close of the fourteenth century, it was endowed with elements and power and influence that it was to hold and develop. It obtained strength and organization that thereafter made it such an influential part of the government. Chaucer himself sat in Parliament as a member for Kent. In the fourteenth century, Parliament strikes a bargain with the king who realizes he must appeal to the people. When Parliament understood its strength it was quick to make progress and yearly its privileges increased. The commons protested against interference of the Government, against official condidatures, against the election of royal functionaries. On difficult questions members requested that they be allowed to return to their counties for consultation before voting. Great was the power of this gathering. No new taxes could be levied without its consent; every individual or authority had to present a petition or a complaint to the assembly. The king consulted it on peace or war; nothing was too great or small for it to decide. The sovereign, the clergy, and beggars all appealed to it. In the fourteenth century, the time is almost seen when the king reigned but did not govern. The Commons feared nothing; their boldness was seen in their demands and the sentiments of the petitions they drew up to provide concessions, if concessions were given, also, adding an annulling clause in case the king refused. Parliament deposed Richard the Second who fancied he was king by divine right, and that he alone could make or alter the laws of the kingdom according to an assertion attributed to the king. So we see in connection with Parliament an outstanding expression of skepticism towards the customary procedure,

and a distinct refusal to be controlled by absolute authority. We glimpse here the strengthening of principles which were significant in bringing forth freedom for individuals, even in our day.

The English Language--Expressing the Feeling of Nationalism and Independence of Tradition

Another expression of the development of English people towards more freedom and a greater feeling of their own independence was to be seen in the gradual overthrow of the French language which had been superposed upon them. It was a gradual process lasting through several reigns but in the course of the fourteenth century we can see the fusion. In the early part of the century, (about 1311), the text of the king's oath was in Latin, but there was a note added which said if the king was illiterate he was to swear in French. It was the latter tongue in which Edward the Second took his oath (1307): the idea that English could be used evidently did not occur. But at the end of the century, 1399, Henry of Lancaster usurped the throne and in the assembled Parliament pronounced in English the claim to the Crown. It was during this interval that the fusion of the two languages took place. The different phases can be followed almost from year to year.

Since Chaucer was to be an outstanding writer to contribute to the stabilization of the best form of English which was to come into ascendency, it is well that we have an understanding of the use of the language through this period, although we shall say more elsewhere of Chaucer who was to shake off French tradition and to be a great writer in English Literature, and Wycliffe who made common English his fighting weapon. Their influence upon the English language in developing and stabilizing it will be mentioned when we consider their work. However, we may say

here, "They worked for the liberties of England, for her place in the light of the sun, and their chief weapon was the independent English language, newly arisen from the confusion of dialects, and newly-protected by the court"[1]..........."The reformer and the poet worked on towards the same national end"[1]..........Chaucer's poetry was a most valuable outcome and proof of the indication of national sentiment during the fourteenth century. Another manifestation of this growth is the appearance before the end of the century of the English version of the Bible by John Wycliffe and his disciples.

In the first half of the fourteenth century the rustics were still anxious to learn French in order to imitate the nobles. Their efforts did have a remarkable result since these people could not speak pure French, so confused the two vocabularies, thus helping really to create the new language. It was on the lips of these "lowe men"[2] the fusion began, and they are said to be the real founders of modern English. So the French of "Stratford-at-Bow"[2] which Chaucer made his Prioress in The Canterbury Tales speak rather than the "French of Paris"[2] had something to do with making a new language.

> "And French she spak ful faire and fetisly,
> After the scole of Stratford atte Bowe,[3]
> For Frensh of Paris was to hir unknowe."

The rustics' manner of speaking the French idiom had an influence even upon the nobles also, who were not always able to escape the consequences of perpetual contact with them. In the best families, the children, in constant communication with native

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1. Magnus, Laurie: How to Read English Literature--Chaucer to Milton P.22
2. Jusserand, J.J.: A Literary History of the English People P. 237
3. Skeat : The Student's Chaucer--Complete Works P.420 Lines 124, 125, 126.

servants and peasants, spoke French less and less correctly, confusing French words that resembled each other. In the courts French was spoken. In 1300 a regulation at Oxford allowed people to express a suit in a language understood generally.

In the second half of the century, counsel and clients did not understand each other. In 1362 a statute declared all pleas to be conducted in English, and in the English law courts, the French language to be discontinued because it was so unknown. Some poets still used French for part of their work. It remained in the court and among the great. Although it was used some in Parliament, English made its appearance there. From 1363, opening speeches were sometimes in English; in 1399, the English tongue was used in acts relating to the deposition of Richard; the king signed his act of resignation which was read in Latin first, then English. Next, Henry claimed the kingdom in English and after an oration by the Archbishop of Canterbury, spoke again, offering thanks to God and the sires in English. This was a memorable sign of the changes taking place when use was made of the English language on an occasion like this by a prince with no title to the Crown except popular favor. The knowledge of French was an elegance, and accomplishment surviving among the upper class, as it has continued to do long after.

So the use of the English language did progress, but it could not in this way be perfected enough. "There was still wanted a man who could use the elements and influences of the time-a great poet--a maker--a creator of literature. The language needed a forming, controlling, fixing hand. The English mind needed a leader and master, English imagination, a guide, English literature, a father."[1] The person who was to answer the call and be

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[1] Coppee, Henry; English Literature Considered as An Interpreter of English History P.62

equal to all these demands was Chaucer whose poetry was an outcome of the sentiment of nationalism during his century. This does not mean that Chaucer was the only influence there was in establishing the English language; there were others. But Chaucer was one significant contributor, and in this study of him and the new spirit of the century, it is only natural that we consider the value of his contribution especially, in spite of the fact that we realize there were many factors and conditions working together to produce the great result of the English language. Because Chaucer was one of the influences in creating it, we acknowledge his part towards fixing this language in which he wrote a masterpiece himself which was to stand. The rise of the nation gave the mother tongue a significance and importance never known before; each nation developed its own tongue, its literature. This development, a phase of the spirit of the growing national life was manifest in general at this time. There was a casting off or absorbing of the language English people had been subjected to with an emphasis of patriotism and cooperation. In this century the country was without a doubt, "the England of the English," [1] and the people were drawing closer together as such. The tongue of the common people was to assert itself over the foreign language that had hitherto been regarded as the means of intercourse; the birthday of English poetry and prose was to come in this epoch in which Chaucer and Wycliffe were both to stand.

[1] Jusserand, J.J.: A Literary History of the English People
P. 257

Religious Skepticism--Wycliffe--A Morning Star of the Reformation

We have arrived now to the consideration of the religious condition of the fourteenth century, one of the greatest factors of medieval politics. It is here that we find perhaps the strongest expression of skepticism towards time-honored authority, in our study. True it is that people were to become not only skeptical, but bitter and inflamed against unjust authority and power, and were to refuse to go on under the old way. Langland, Wycliffe, and Chaucer were to use their pens to satirize the awful state religion was in. "The theory of the universal Roman Empire which had dominated Europe, around which the composite system of kings and dukes and counts had been compelled to group itself, and which was still reflected by a kind of universalism...was giving way to the rivalries of faction, to the growth of a spirit of nationalism and to the inevitable principles of liberty and law." [1] We are to see what vast power the Church had gained, and how the injustice in the use of this, and the means of getting it, was to increase the skepticism of the people towards the old religious absolutism. We are to see also with the growth of power, corruption, love of idleness, worldly pleasure and wealth; and to observe how they added to the feeling of skepticism towards the existing practices and abuse within the Church and even towards its system, before the end of the struggle. In the stand for greater freedom and liberty in religion, Wycliffe was prominent in this century in making a decided move towards the Reformation. His antipathy towards the corruption is characteristic of the feeling of others in this period. "In religion, too, the century is full of signs of a coming change. The Church no longer inspired that devotion which characterized the days of the

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1. Magnus, Laurie: How to Read English Literature--Chaucer to Milton P.19

earlier Crusades. In 1309 the Pope removed from Rome to Avignon, and the reverence and dignity which had hedged him about as the declared vicar of Christ on earth was greatly lessened when men saw him the creature of the growing power of France. The multiplying corruptions in the Church itself, the sordidness and lack of spirituality in its clergy, moved earnest men to scorn and satire. In all this we see signs of the coming Reformation." [1] Many of the reasons for the discontent and dissatisfaction with the Church are suggested in this quotation.

As we look more closely to the causes contributing to the skepticism of the people who were to revolt and to the decline of the Church authority with its papal machinery, we see the great power gained during the course of centuries over both the souls and bodies of mankind, in temporal as well as spiritual affairs. The claims to spiritual authority were irritating, but the temporal claims were just as severe, affecting the whole life of the individual, even aside from his actual religious life. The Church controlled the lives of people from beginning to end. While the country was over-burdened, there was one organization, the Church, which rolled in riches at the expense of the people. This institution was more political than religious. It claimed to be the supreme civil power in Europe, arrogating to itself the right to dethrone kings and instruct Parliaments. It reached out for full control and absolute power over life. Its dignitaries were present and at the source of every intrigue that would arrest the nation's march to freedom. The Church held vast lands and possessions; their civil and ecclesiastical authority was strong and cleverly organized and located; it had a monopoly of learning which put into their hands much power of authority

1. Pancoast, H.S.: Representative English Literature from Chaucer to Tennyson P. 28

and many opportunities for advancement over those not in the learned class. It made appointees in the Church the ministers and confidants of rulers, and placed the direction of affairs of Europe in their hands largely. The Pope, the bishops, the clergy, the monks and friars were getting more and more money from the people; there were tithes, offerings, fines for spiritual offences, various fees, and the cost of cases in ecclesiastical courts--all this mounted up to a large total for those receiving it, and the loss was felt keenly by those who were forced to give so much, especially when they received no good in return. Much of the money went outside their country to Rome, while many were displeased with this because they would rather have been collecting more within their own realms. There were rulers who felt danger was arising because of mighty control of the Church which was ever tightening its hold making more room for itself and less for the State and inhabitants.

Indeed, the assumptions of the Papacy were not limited to one class but were extended from reigning monarch to the humblest subject; they were pressed upon national and international relations and upon any individual. It was not merely a spiritual dominance but a combination of religious and social rule of society under which the control of people was to be dependent on the subtleties of not infallible men who, although discrediting the intellect in their belief, used their own imperfect intellects to define what was good and evil for their fellow-creatures. This was not all; in addition to claiming spiritual assumption the Pope claimed power, after laying down the law of good and evil, to dispense men from obligation to do good, and to indulge them in commission of evil. It was not only civil governments which were encroached upon, but hierarchies of national churches that were harassed and offended. By interdicts, ex-

communications, and depositions the Church had exasperated monarchs and people. It had asserted rights of mandate and investiture, and frequently overruled elections of metropolitans and bishops ignoring claims of clergy as well as Crown. It had exacted large sums of money (annata) on promotions and translations; it had set up a Papal Curia as jurisdiction external to every country yet claiming supremacy in all, and had authorized legates to override decisions of hierarchies and provincial councils in national churches. But when the clergy, monks, or friars abused privileges clearly to the detriment of the State, Rome practically invariably encouraged subordinates to defy and resist civil power and claimed for them both moral and material immunity against jurisdictions.

Pope Boniface in peremptory language required French and English kings to abstain from placing any taxes whatever upon the clergy. This, more than being merely a form of papal interference, aggravated the people. The significant fact for us to remember as we discuss additional demands shown by the papal authorities is that it was the excessive use of this force which was creating keen discontent that was to lead to revolt. It is the effect upon the people we are to watch for, as a move towards freedom. So the Pope issued Clericis laicos declaring monarchs had no right to exact taxes or aids from clergy, or even voluntary grants without the sanction of the Holy Father, and threatened to excommunicate any who persisted in doing it. In his "little bull"[1.] of 1300 Boniface said:" We desire you to know that you are subject to us in temporal as well as in spiritual affairs."[1.] The attitude of the people is shown by the order to have this command burned. Strong feeling against

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1. Sergeant, Lewis: John Wyclif--Last of the Schoolmen and First of the Reformers P. 36

undue authority was growing. Even clergy refused to admit temporal supremacy of Rome. In 1302, Boniface drew up the famous Bull Unam Sanctam which brought to a point the infatuated but fatal claim of universal temporal power. "The Church, he declared, is one holy and undivided body having but a single head".[1]..... "The spiritual and the temporal sword are alike under the control of the Church; the latter must be employed by those who wear it on behalf of the Church, and the former by the Church itself--the former wielded by a priestly hand, the latter by the hand of monarchs and soldiers, though only at the summons and under the sanction of the priest. Moreover, the one sword ought to be subject to the other, and the temporal to the spiritual authority... ......we declare, state, lay down and pronounce that it is an indispensable article of faith for every human being that he is a subject of the Roman pontiff."[1] With this, Boniface overreached himself; it sealed his doom; he soon died, and the cardinals hastily elected Benedict who rescinded the bulls of his predecessor and admitted Philip the Fair to communion without insisting on concessions. In this he gave a fatal blow at a crucial time to temporal authority at Rome. This authority was to receive more blows; it could not overrule forever; people were not to accept slavery. They were rather to demand and fight for liberty. Benedict died within a year, and the next Pope was Philip's nominee.

The twofold supremacy, temporal and spiritual, was indeed mighty. The former in its widest extent demanded the right to depose kings, free their subjects from their allegiance, and bestow their territories on another. The spiritual power was believed to be vested in one universal bishop according to the tradit-

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1. Sergeant, Lewis; John Wyclif--Last of the Schoolmen and First of the Reformers P.37

ional theory. In him all spiritual and ecclesiastical powers were summed up. All other members of the hierarchy were delegates selected by him for purposes of administration. With this interpretation of the system, the Bishop of Rome was the absolute monarch over kingdoms called spiritual; but these kingdoms were really as thoroughly material as those of France, Spain, or England. For according to medieval ideas, men were in spiritual service if they had taken orders, or were under monastic vows. Fields, or drains, or fences were spiritual things, were property of the Church as were houses or barns if they belonged to the Church. The papal kingdom was miscalled spiritual; it was scattered over Europe in diocesan lands, convent estates, and parishes, interwoven with ordinary kingdoms and principalities of Europe.

All this caused endless interference between spiritual and temporal boundaries. Part of the Pope's claim to spiritual supremacy was that his subjects, the clergy, owed no allegiance to the monarch within whose territory they resided; that they lived outside that sphere of civil law and taxation, but under special laws imposed on them by the supreme spiritual ruler, and paid taxes to him alone. So was involved intermeddling time and again between temporal and spiritual sovereignty all over Europe. The state of affairs civil and sacred were so mixed up we can see that it was impossible to speak of the Reformation as purely a religious movement.

The new Pope, after Benedict, transferred the headquarters to Avignon (1309) where for about seventy years seven different Popes, all French with a French majority in the College of Cardinals abode near the shelter of the kings of France. All over Christendom minds of the faithful were profoundly disturbed by the removal of the Pope from Rome which was believed by the Christians to be the true capital of Christendom. We may think

of this transfer as another factor adding to the already restless condition, and strengthening keenly the skeptical attitude towards the papal authority. Without a doubt, the new Pope by his removal lost prestige previously maintained, and reverence with which he had been regarded at Rome was much lessened, especially when he seemed to be a political tool of France's growing power, and favoring even England's foes. Actually, a prominent feature of the new residence was a large increase in papal expenditure and revenue. This was partly due to bringing large increase to the Pope's hands of the right of appointment to an increasing number of church offices making it possible for him to demand of his papal appointees, not five per cent, but half the first year's income of the bishopric or estate (annates). Moreover, far-sighted office-seekers in the Church by liberal expenditure, received assurance at papal court that certain positions should be theirs at the death of the present incumbent. Another source of papal revenue was from payments for dispensations and from the contributions of the faithful in connection with indulgences, pardons, and jubilees or anniversaries. Regular papal collectors were scattered through Western Europe.

At the papal court was great magnificence; officials were very corrupt and demanded no end of tips and fees. Another reason why the Popes required more revenue at Avignon was that their possessions in Italy were in a state of rebellion and confusion, so they not only could derive little income from them now, but spent a good deal trying to subdue them. The Popes remained at Avignon partly because Rome and its vicinity had gradually been getting too hot for them. The long absence from Rome greatly scandalized many persons; the grasping of money and more money often spent selfishly and for mere strengthening of power, with the emphasis

on worldly position and show rather than on spiritual respect and reverence disgusted folks. The finances were closely systematized and everything possible was done to ensure the collection of vast sums of money. "The principal aim of the Church seemed to be to tax the world."[1.] The blow dealt to the prestige of the Papacy by this captivity at Avignon with its corruption was one from which it could never recover.

It was in this century (1322) that an argument occurred and a decision was given which augmented the already bitter feeling against and disbelief in the Papacy, and was to count decidedly in weakening still more the old servitude. It was in connection with the doctrine of poverty which was an essential of St. Francis' constitution. When Franciscans began to hold houses and lands of their own, and relax in apostolic fervor as well as in evangelical poverty, they really ceased to fulfill the purposes for which the organization was founded. However, many of the friars held to the original rule, and were called Spirituals or Observants. So there arose a dispute between the two sections, those who abode by the old principles, and those who did not confine themselves thus. Finally, it was declared from Rome that while the Order was debarred from actual ownership, it was entitled to the profits of the acquisition, but the property itself was vested in the Supreme Pontiff. (It was Pope Nicholas the Third who formulated the bull to this effect). However, the Spirituals were not satisfied with such a partial vindication. The principle involved, so important to them, became almost a new basis of religious faith. They believed Christ and his disciples were voluntarily poor; poverty was an indispensable note of the true Church.

1. Thatcher, O.J. and Schwill F.: Europe in the Middle Age P.580

There was cause for great alarm on the part of the Pope and his supporters. A development of one of the chief factors of pure Christianity was seen to be in direct conflict with the teaching and practice of the Papacy. If the Spirituals were right, the Pope, superior clergy, monks, were all unapostilic, even anti-Christian. The effect was so staggering it is something of a turning-point of the early affairs leading to the Reformation.

Another instance of marked resentfulness by the people against the encroachments of the Pope and interference in temporal matters, and an exhibition of the growing independence of the people was shown when the Pope (Urban) demanded (from Edward) payment of arrears of an annual tribute of 1000 marks, promised by King John, which had not been paid to the papal treasury for about thirty years. There were various reasons why this demand was offensive; shortly before, Statutes had been framed asserting emphatically the independence of the empire and imposing penalties on all who should affirm the supremacy of the Pope who would infringe when he desired, in any way, on the rights of the people or king. After such action, the Pope's demand was like intentional defiance and like a formal declaration that all such enactments as had been made by them were to be null and void so far as he was concerned. His claim, too, came not from Rome, but Avignon, where the head of the Church was residing, himself a Frenchman, and a slave of a French monarch; it was reasonably suspected that money was needed not to meet the wants of the Church, but to swell the resources of the nation's rival, and enable him to carry on war with England.

It is Parliament's response to the demand made that reflects the bitter and daring rage and skepticism of practices and methods used. In Parliament "With one voice, Lords spiritual, and temporal, as well as the members of the lower chamber, indignantly de-

nied the obligation, and with no bated breath or whispered humbleness let it be known after what fashion they would shape their reply, were any attempt made to enforce the claim."[1] Sentiment such as this was felt and expressed by members of Parliament; "Let the Pope get the money if he can; England is not afraid.....Christ was no civil govenor....neither should the Pope be if he is Christ's follower........Wages are for work.... ...but Popes and cardinals do us no good either in body, or soul, therefore give them no pay."[1]

It is significant that Wycliffe's ability and opinion was recognized so much that he was called upon to aid in the stand taken. He did zealously try to vindicate the attitude of the king and Parliament, denying the right of the Pope as a temporal lord. He expressed the feeling of various members, as given above, through the mouths of various characters in writing. Also speaking in his own name, he repudiated the opinion of the Pope who would declare that the State had no right to meddle with ecclesiastical persons or possessions. We shall see more of Wycliffe's beliefs and teachings when we consider him by himself--this man who is so outstandingly typical of the skeptical attitude rife in the whole period of this century, the forces of which were moving Chaucer who also was to write with satire of the conditions in the religious life of his day.

Another striking incident in this century which caused extreme resentment on the part of the people against the procedure of the Papacy was the Schism of 1378. At this time the Roman populace rebelled and insisted that the papal residence be brought back to Rome from Avignon. The cardinals, mostly Frenchmen, gathered in the Vatican to choose a new Pope, with

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1. The Ministers of the United Presbyterian Church, Graduates of the University of Glasgow; The Reformers: Lectures Delivered in St. James Church P. 17

a violent mob outside. It was roaring with furious zeal; "We want a Roman! We want an Italian!"[1] The cardinals were terrified. Finally an Italian was elected to the Papacy. Only a few months later the cardinals repented of their choice and elected a Frenchman in the other's stead. But the Italian refused to surrender his office, and Europe was scandalized by seeing two Popes ruling, neither of whom could be called a usurper since each had been properly elected by the same body. This double rule or Great Schism reduced the Papacy so that the "old claim to sovereignty in temporal matters was never again asserted with success."

This Schism was to expose the Papacy to new attacks on every side. Each of the two men claimed to be Christ's vicar on earth, and each expected to enjoy the privileges of the head of Christendom. Here were two rival pontiffs each claiming to be vicegerent of Christ, one at Rome thundering forth against his brother at Avignon, and the latter cursing his brother at Rome. The different rulers and nations of Europe had taken different sides; in order to hold the support of these States, the rival Popes had to make concessions, and abandon somewhat previous papal custom of interference in national politics. On the other hand there were two papal courts to be maintained, so the burden of taxation was felt more. In many localities there were struggles for church positions and benefices between rival appointees of the two Popes. These circumstances with the unreadiness of rival Popes and cardinals to sacrifice in order to restore church unity caused great scandal and stress throughout Christendom and damaged noticeably the prestige of the Papacy.

[1] Browne, Lewis: *Since Calvary* P.230
[2] Browne, Lewis: *Since Calvary* P.230

Christendom itself was divided as never before. This very division was not a power of strength, but weakness, and when combined with the other factors present was to lead to more severe discord. Nowhere was opinion unanimous but dissension appeared everywhere. Each Pope tried to appoint his own adherents to every office and resorted to many devices to raise money. The Schism in the headship naturally extended to bishoprics and abbeys; everywhere were rival prelates. Scandal was unprecedented in the Church. It emphasized all the abuses among the clergy and gave free reign to those who were denouncing evils. The condition was really intolerable and gave rise to widespread discussion not only of the means by which to heal the Schism, but of the nature and justification of the Papacy itself. The discussion which arose during these years of the Schism did much in preparing the mind of Western Europe for reform to come later. The religious life of the people suffered. Most disastrous of all was the influence upon the simple believer of the sight of such a divided Church. "Europe was genuinely dismayed." [1] Such wretched quarrelling within the Church itself, especially over the heads of the Church, led to skepticism more as time went on, and as each claimed superiority. People's eyes were opened, and they felt as if the Church would not lose much if it lost both heads. The authority of Rome was diminished by such an affair and was fuŕther impaired; it was to depreciate still more. Doubt was fostered; faith was shattered; respect and reverence for the head of the Church representing Christ seemed lacking. Some were convinced that a Crusade in Christendom was as necessary as one against avowed infidels, the most effective weapons for a new crusade being those of apostolic poverty and fervor.

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1. Thomson, J.W.: History of the Middle Ages P.345

The Pope was "a Jupiter armed with thunderbolts of interdict and excommunication." [1]

Another element producing bitter skepticism among the people was the corruption of the Church which was widespread during this century. This arose partly as a result of the vast power and wealth accumulated, partly from the dissensions present, and was deepened somewhat by the results of the Plague which lessened numbers so quickly and so largely that it was impossible to replace men of the best training or calibre. And there were those who were in the Church through graft and for selfish reasons, anyway, who increased and spread not only positive corruption but a spirit lowering to the ideal religious one. The pollution was general all through the Church in the higher and lower orders. It is a factor too influential not to regard, and weighed much in turning minds away from servitude to exemption from restraint. Chivalry and feudalism under which the system had prospered were failing, and the Church which had been dependent upon these institutions which were weakening could not expect to be the same.

The Good Parliament showed its aversion and styled its complaint thus: "These brokers of the city of Rome..... who sold benefices to the highest bidder, whose income was as large again as the royal revenue, who had turned the Church into a huge banking concern, and who haggled and bargained about the very grace of God as if it were an ox or an ass, these were no successors of the man who had said, 'Silver and gold have I none.'" [2] ....."Wretched "penny priests" they were who bartered to the devil the souls Christ had redeemed by His precious blood........ Ah, Lord God, where is there reason," says a petition to king

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[1] Magnus, Laurie: How to Read English Literature--Chaucer to Milton P.17

[2] Ministers of the United Presbyterian Church, Graduates of the University of Glasgow: The Reformers: Lectures Delivered in St. James Church P.32

and Parliament, "to constrain the poor people to find a worldly priest, sometimes unable, both of life and cunning, in pomp and pride, covetousness......Gluttony and drunkenness and lechery, simony and heresy, with fat horse, and jolly and gay saddles, and bridles ringing by the way, and himself in costly clothes and furs to suffer their wives and children and their poor neighbors perish for hunger, thirst, and cold, and other mischiefs of the world." [1]

The Pope himself was thought of as "most contrary to Christ, ...poison under colour of holiness,......and the root and ground of all the misgoverning of the Church." [2] By some minds he was thought of as Anti-Christ, and if a vicar, a vicar of Satan. Monks, friars, abbots, and bishops swarmed about clutching greedily at offices of state. Things were in such a plight it was no exaggeration to say they "crept into hovels of the poor, cajoled or threatened them out of scanty earnings." [3] There was every type and character, friar, summoner, limitor, and pardoner. Some priests played the tyrant; some feigned a poverty to which they were really strangers; others made no attempt to hide their horses, hounds, furs and jewellry, good fellowship, or dainty fare. When we come to Chaucer's works we shall see how truly he portrays these typical characters, and how he satirizes their dress, their love of worldly things, their lack of the spiritual, and the empty form of many of their religious activities. There were in this century "goat-voiced pardoners who exhibited their relics to gaping.....crowds, and jolly friars lisped and sang and harped the

[1] Ministers of the United Presbyterian Church, Graduates of the University of Glasgow: The Reformers: Lectures Delivered in St. James Church P. 31

[2] The Reformers: Lectures Delivered in St. James Church P.32

[3] The Reformers: Lectures Delivered in St. James Church P.32

money out of people's pockets."[1]

Indeed, the debasement of the papal court was too great to be hidden. Its infamy was debilitation to its own cause. "There were bishops who were mere statesmen and warriors, and neglected their diocesan work; there were secular clergy who never saw their parishes and monasteries where religion and sound learning were less regarded than wealth and high living."[2] The extensive wealth made by the Church and monasteries with the small profit brought to the nation caused popular comment. Wealth and privileges had led to abuse and pollution by abbots and monks as well as secular clergy, in participation in politics and relaxation of religious observances. Higher regulars had the policy of adding land to land. Friars were preaching to the people from profit. Papal legates kept fools and jesters and encouraged flattering and lying. Parsons and parish priests, archdeacons, and deacons;

> "Are loping to London by leave of their bishop[3]
> To sing there for simony, for silver is sweet.

Pardoners blinded people's eyes with bulls and briefs, but were really gluttons and profligates who practiced vice and who spent what the poor in the parish would otherwise have.

We may gather more of the depravity of the century in one of Wycliffe's messages in which he gives his idea of a clergyman's life as it should be. What most of the clergymen of his day were not is shown here in A Short Rule of Life, one of his English writings: "If thou be a priest....live thou holily, passing others in holy prayer and holy desire and thinking, in holy speaking, counselling, and true teaching and ever that God's commands and is shown here in

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[1] Ministers of the United Presbyterian Church, Graduates of the University of Glasgow: The Reformers: Lectures Delivered in St. James Church P.6

[2] Oman, Charles: A History of England P. 199

[3] The Reformers: Lectures Delivered In St. James Church P. 562

His gospel be in thy mouth, and ever despise sin, to draw men therefrom. And that thy deeds be so rightful that no man shall blame them with reason but thine open deeds be a true book to all subjects, and lead men to serve God and do His commands thereby. For example of God, and open and lasting, stirreth rude men more than true preaching by naked word. And waste not thy goods in great feasts of rich men, but live mean life of poor men's alms and goods; both in meat and drink and clothes; and the remnant give truly to poor men that have not of their own, and may not labour for feebleness or sickness, and then shalt thou be a true priest to God and man." [1]

The Church was sadly in need of redemption from hard-heartedness, worldliness, and corruption. It made a virtue of bigotry and fanaticism; it made strengthening of its power a purpose and an end; it had an elaborate complex theology understood by few; it was fairly flooded with wealth and avariciousness; it was filled with haughtiness and pride. No wonder it had alienated the hearts of masses, even though at first they might not dare to admit it, when they could not help feeling it with such happenings all around them. To have the Church in such a state in the face of the poor and distressed who needed relief and charity heightened contempt, and made men feel--and they were right--that a large share of their leaders were not representatives of spiritual life, but were more sordid and worldly minded than many beneath them; that these were not fit to lead, but ought to be led. The Church forgot the poor and lowly in its ambition to accumulate riches. Verily, it needed a new life to save it from itself; it needed somehow to be recalled from politics and

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[1] Ministers of the United Presbyterian Church, Graduates of the University of Glasgow: The Reformers: Lectures Delivered in St. James Church P. 25

property to labor in the service of humanity.

The general shame into which the Church had fallen in every country could not fail to weaken its hold on the popular mind. Definite expressions of the condition of mind against the Papacy in England in the fourteenth century are shown. The feeling was not only present, but it was exhibited in no uncertain ways some of which we have already alluded to. These actually were steps towards a great rejection of absolute supremacy; they represented a move towards franchise for the individual. For these years of disapprobation were paving the way; the strides taken in legislation, and the opinions expressed in writing and talking were momentous not merely for what they accomplished at the time, but for what they were leading toward; they were momentous because of the enlightenment and audacity filling the minds of the people and converting in them incredulity with the old established practices. Statutes of Provisors and Praemunire, the repudiation of the Pope's claims for money or power by Parliament, propositions to tax clergy or confiscate property, and general hostility towards the actions of the Church reveal the increasing opposition to the arbitrary control. Langland finds much to criticise in the Church of his time. He battles against the degradation and lowery atmosphere, and satirizes it that men may see the folly and shallowness, and may be penitent and return to holy contemplation and living. Sloth personified as a clergyman confesses:

> "I have been priest and parson passing thirty winters;
> Yet I can neither tell the notes,
> Nor sing, nor read a Saint's life,
> But I can find in a field and in a furlong a hare,
> And hold a knight's court, and account with the reeve,
> But I cannot construe Cato, or speak clerically." 1.

1. Thorndike, Lynn: The History of Medieval Europe P. 563

In Chaucer's work we shall see portrayed characters who were more familiar with worldly pleasures than with spiritual affairs. Chaucer gives us a picture representing the religious corruption. There we see individuals who had become a bane, many being nothing more than tramps (although called friars) wandering through the country robbing peasants of hard-earned money. They recited Masses, heard confessions, and gave absolutions for a price, carrying around outrageous relics to exhibit and sell--supposedly arms and legs of the apostles, tears of the Blessed Virgin, fragments of the true cross. Monks in the cloisters were living evil corrupted lives, rather than refraining from evil to teach good. They were making the monastery a harbor for vice instead of virtue; we shall see these conditions vividly illustrated as we study Chaucer's works.

"In England there were many signs that all was not well with the Church." [1] Truly, a transition was at hand. The weakness of the old system of absolutism was not suited even at the beginning of the fourteenth century to the social or civil life. "The Catholic Church of Rome and the Catholic representative of the head of the ancient Roman Empire...were no longer to be the end-all and be-all of religious speculation and civic ambition." [2] Schisms in the Papacy itself and dissensions in the Empire had debilitating effects; individual towns had developed characters of their own corresponding to growing local needs of commercial and municipal enterprise. Tradition was not strong enough to keep an old system going in the face of new situations and demands, and under a deterioration of the leaders of the old system. The Emperor himself

1. Wingfield--Stratford: The History of British Civilization
   P. 255
2. Magnus, Laurie: How to Read English Literature--Chaucer to Milton P. 19

could not prevent enrichment of the burghers, nor affairs of war, trade, or politics; he could not rule human passion; he could not prevent England from starting her fairs as centers of trade and education, and from inviting foreigners to import their skill of labor, from fighting France for an open market, though population was lessened by the Black Death, and social problems ensued.

"The storm broke in the latter half of the fourteenth century." 1. England's spirit as a nation was expanding; it was becoming self-conscious of its might, gaining self-assurance. Despite the Plague, there was wealth in the land even if largely in the power of a few; there was love of culture and beauty; Chaucer was singing his Canterbury Tales in the tongue of the nation, not in French or Latin. The first of the public schools was founded. Patriotism was coming to its own; the English were growing suspicious of the foreign.

All these changes could not help affecting the feeling of the English towards the Church. They began to realize that the Pope was a foreigner (often aiding his own kind). His claim to sovereignty over their king, looked at thus, seemed with the new-found dignity more than they were to stand for. Prelates, mostly foreigners, appointed by the Pope, had altogether a revenue exceeding that of the king. "The sentiment of nationalism, perhaps the greatest single force in our modern world was unknown to the medieval world." 2.

However, in examining the religious background of this century we cannot completely comprehend the magnitude reached unless we know John Wycliffe who actively expressed in writing, preaching,

1. Browne, Lewis: Since Calvary P. 255
2. Thompson, J.W.: History of the Middle Ages P. 336

and living so greatly the spirit of his time, both in repellent attitude towards the low practices and corruption of the Church and unjust authority and power, and in the demand for justice and knowledge of the truth for everyone--for he has been called the Morning Star of the Reformation. Thus in gazing upon him we see repeated much of the same spirit we have already been emphasizing. But we see it more distinctly, because he vigorously pronounced his views, and maintained against strong opposition his beliefs. There were many who felt injustice and doubt who dared not lift voice, nor could not lift pen against it, but Wycliffe could and did give his active and well-trained life in combating superstition and tradition, and wrong; he led the way even to the Reformation. He is a mouthpiece of his age; so in considering him with his teachings we come face to face with the century and with probably the greatest example of skepticism and the overthrow of arbitrary domination in the medieval world. "So accustomed are we to refer the Reformation to the time of Luther in Germany, as the grand religious turning-point in modern history, that we are apt to underrate, if not to forget the religious movement in this important era of English history. Chaucer and Wyclif wrote nearly half a century before John Huss was burned by Sigismund; it was a century after that Luther burned the Pope's decretals at Wittenburg and still later that Henry the Eighth threw off the papal domination in England. But great crises in a nation's history never arrive without premonitory throes, and sometimes these are more decisive and destructive than that which gives electric publicity. Such distinct signs appeared in the age of Chaucer, and the later history of the Church in England cannot be distinctly understood without a careful study of this period." [1]

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[1] Coppee, H.: English Literature--Considered as an Interpreter of English History P. 72

Wycliffe's skepticism drove him from tradional Christianity. The subject of the early reformation set forth in the stories of Chaucer can be better appreciated with an understanding of his great contemporary and co-worker, Wycliffe. While it is not the place in this study to treat the movement of the Reformation as such, it is the place to point out the keen skepticism of this century in religion and its bearing in leading to the climax of the overthrow of sovereignty, the Reformation. When we contemplate the bigness of the result, we appreciate the part of Wycliffe and other fourteenth century contributions to any such far-reaching movement. And however remote these questions at issue in this century or at the time of the Reformation may seem, we know that they concerned a vital matter, the relation between Church and State which is still in one way or another of momentous import. The hints Chaucer placed in the mouths of his characters, Wycliffe, a secular priest, proclaimed boldly first from his professor's chair at Oxford; then, from forced retirement. Born about four years before Chaucer, the same abuses which called forth satires of Langland and Chaucer upon the monk and friar, and which promised universal corruption unless checked, aroused the martyr zeal of Wycliffe. The England to which Wycliffe belonged was the very one which still lives in Chaucer's Canterbury Tales. The lot of these men was cast in a time of singular interest and importance.

"Wyclif was a scholar and thinker, a noble idealist in thrall to a high purpose." [1] He had the standing of doctor and professor

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[1] Library of World's Best Literature Ancient and Modern P. 16236

of theology, ex-master of Balliol, a brilliant preacher and lecturer, king's chaplain, a trusted adviser of Parliament, and one of the chief notables of the time. From quiet country home he was to go to a thronging restless University town with thousands of students where he was to have his horizon enlarged, and to be brought face to face with characters and movements full of interest and novelty especially to a quick observant intellect. Oxford was "during the fourteenth century, by far the greatest theological and philosophical university in Europe." [1] But this student was destined to add not a little to the lustre of the famous school, finally. He it was who was to stand forth so prominently in his age which formed "a joint and hinge of religious history." [2] He stood at the parting of the ways which led from the Middle Ages to a revival of learning; he himself was a link between his century and definite revolt in Rome. The time was at hand when the English Church was to break away from "foreign trammels." [3]

As theologian he was considered the most eminent in his day; as philosopher, second to none; as a schoolman, incomparable. It was partly because of his thorough training and education that he was able with his keen intellect to obtain the position and standing he did, so that he was recognized and called upon for aid, even by the king and Parliament to help in thinking through and maintaining their rights against the Papacy. His rigid discipline and training no doubt all helped to make him such a resolute and incisive reformer. Of great value was the fact that he achieved fame as "a prince among schoolmen." [4]

[1] Creasy's History of England Vol. II Chap. 5

[2] Sergeant, Lewis: John Wyclif Last of the Schoolmen and First of the English Reformers P. 6

[3] Sergeant, Lewis: John Wyclif Last of the Schoolmen and First of the English Reformers P. 23

[4] Ministers of the United Presbyterian Church, Graduates of the University of Glasgow; The Reformers: Lectures Delivered in St. James Church P. 5

Confidence was placed in him; he was able to sway throngs and individuals. Those in opposition to him found they were striking against a firm well-informed personality. But, more than this book learning was to count another kind of understanding. His ear was not deaf to lessons by a higher Teacher than was to be found at Oxford. Some of his passionate earnestness may have been stirred more deeply by the distress caused and the impress made by the Plague. It left its mark upon the history of the nation, and a man of Wycliffe's temperament might probably have felt vividly a sense of the supreme need of spiritual reality.

Wycliffe wrote about Church and State because the former was so intent on devouring the latter and degrading it until it was a mere puppet. Authority from the view-point of the Church included the whole heterogeneous mass of ecclesiastical tradition with its elaborate subdivisions; with Wycliffe, it was simply and only the Word of God: "If there were one hudred Popes, and all the friars were made cardinals, their opinion should carry no weight in matters of faith except it be based on Scripture!" [1] It was a more daring stand than had ever been taken in England before--to defy convention and tradition, and to dare to break with the prevailing system which poor as it was had the prestige of commanding the respect of centuries, and because of what it was supposed to represent.

Wycliffe denied absolutely the right of the Pope or priest to possess temporal lordship or to be independent of civil authority; and he declared the State must assert its rule over all citizens without distinction of class or person. He prepared sound reasons for refusing demands and for repudiating all papal claims to temporal overlordship, when the king and Parliament called him to aid

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[1] Browne, Lewis: Since Calvary P. 257

in this stand. He emerged distinctly in 1366 when the Pope demanded arrears of payment to the treasury promised by King John. In his early career Wycliffe opposed the Papacy by trying to prove John's compact void.

An important step in Wycliffe's career was the publication of his treatise on Divine Dominion the preface to which is regarded by Professor Shirley as "the true epoch of the beginning of the English Reformation."[1] The fundamental principle is that all dominion belongs to God alone, others such as Popes, priests, emperors, kings and individual men holding offices directly from Him and on condition of loyal service and obedience to Him. This one principle struck at the root of sacerdotal supremacy, and provoked the ire of the ecclesiastical world. In the strong attempts to repress Wycliffe and his influence and teachings, we see the important hold he was gaining. The Papacy had need to fear and tremble; their roots were being undermined.

With equal emphasis Wycliffe challenged the Pope's supremacy in spiritual things. The Power of the Keys was a sacerdotal assumption; excommunication, only in control of God who was able to discern true character. Neither could the Pope grant remission of sins; indulgences were worthless and wicked mockeries, "a subtle merchandise of Antichrist's clerks which tempt men to wallow in sin like hogs...........Christ, and Christ alone, is the true custoder.....grace."[2]

While he condemns so unsparingly the clergy, as we have already found, this reformer spares not denunciation of mendicant orders (who professed poverty, but failed to live it). He scourged with great scorn the able-bodied beggars and robbers of rich and poor.

[1] Ministers of the United Presbyterian Church, Graduates of the University of Glasgow: The Reformers: Lectures Delivered in St. James Church P. 17

[2] The Reformers: Lectures Delivered in St. James Church P. 33

He gathered proofs of falsehood, dishonesty, and blasphemy; and never in the whole history of the Church, according to some, has so conclusive a demonstration been given of the corruption of the orders that began in the spirit of holiness. He trampled on their appeal to the example of Christ as a mendicant. He repudiated the doctrine of transubstantiation of which they were champions.

By his assault upon dogma, he hoped to do much to emancipate the people from a pernicious superstition, and to wrest from the hands of the clergy a weapon which had been used too long to enslave and tyrannise over a credulous Church. Wycliffe's battle for the people, who had been denied their rights and privileges and been kept in ignorance of the truth of God, and his eagerness for them is shown in his very methods. His originality was displayed especially in the bold unprecedented appeal to the common people, who were becoming more prominent now to bear their part in casting off the oppressive yoke of the clergy. It was rather a new thing for the laity to even be credited with the right to think let alone to act independently, in ecclesiastical or spiritual affairs, above all. By means of his short, pungent tracts and originality of method of influencing national thought, he wielded a power since felt in England's political and religious history. This was most daring when he used it to put into people's hands the very Bible, but we shall speak of that later.

Another point of attack of Wycliffe is the sermons which he ridicules as pitiable mutterings passing as sermons; he says they might make idiots laugh, but could only make wise men weep, such was the emptiness of form. Outward observances were looked upon by many as religion, and had tended to become idolatry and superstition. Wycliffe had no patience with long-robed quacks who instead of preaching the truth of God talked only a medley of

pagan mythology and incredible ideas. He pointed to the so-called preacher as a great sinner whose aim was only to amuse his audience enough to put them in a good frame of mind so they would be willing to pay him liberally for the entertainment. Wycliffe set himself to redeem the situation from the desecration which had befallen it; his sermons throb with earnestness, directness, passion, and spirituality. It was these characteristics with his boldness which influenced inhabitants of London and others far from London in later days.

The exceeding wealth of the Church and the clergy was another point of attack by Wycliffe. He knew the skepticism the accumulation with its evil use caused. He urged a return to poverty saying that the Church itself was choked with its love of possessions and wealth. He appealed to clergy to forego their riches and return to wholesomeness, and quoting St. Bernard says, "Whatsoever thou takest of tithes and offerings besides simple livelihood and straight clothing, it is not thine, it is theft, ravine, and sacrilege."[1] In his work on Civil Dominion the proposal is made that temporalities be taken from the clergy as property of the realm, so the kingdom should be wisely defended with its own possessions.

One incident which caused the fire to burn even brighter in Wycliffe's soul against the wealth of the Papacy was the appearance of the papal emissary to gather funds. He came in style with a large retinue and good amount of ill-spared gold; after about two years of harvesting, he withdrew to Rome resolved to return for fresh spoil in a few months. This exhibition of papal greed called forth a tractate in which Wycliffe tried to show the false-

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[1] Ministers of United Presbyterian Church, Graduates of the University of Glasgow: The Reformers: Lectures Delivered in St. James Church P. 33

hood of this greedy foreigner who received permission to prosecute his work in England, all of which was a violation. For he had sworn to do nothing harmful to the interests of the kingdom, while he was constantly robbing it of its resources for his own necessities. Wycliffe declared this should be withstood; and we see proof of sympathy and approval in the appointment of Wycliffe to act on a commission sent to Bruges (1374) to confer with the Pope about questions of procedure and jurisdiction.

"The most famous and conspicuous critic of the Pope and the policy of the Roman Church was the Englishman John Wyclife, a teacher at Oxford."[1.] After Wycliffe began to question Church authority, he found he ought to do more than assail the position of the Papacy. He was a religious man as well as a patriot and he could not blind himself to the fact that the whole system was corrupt with wealth and luxury. He did not halt with attacking the clergy; he went further and assailed the abuses and dogma which gave the clergy its power.

"Wyclif was a forerunner of the later Protestants in making the Bible the sole standard of religious belief and practice and in rejecting such customs and doctrines of the medieval Church as he felt could not be justified by Scripture; for instance, auricular confession, celibacy of the clergy, masses for the dead, and the doctrine of purgatory."[2.] Not only did he contend the Pope and clergy in political power, and hold that the State was as directly authorized and founded by God as the church; not only did he declare that the clergy were entitled to their privileges only so long as they lived deservingly; he argued, too, that their spiritual power depended upon their personal faith and conduct, so that even

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[1.] Robinson, J.H.: History of Western Europe P. 372
[2.] Robinson, J.H.: History of Western Europe P. 565

a Pope who did not live Christlike was no head of a Church but anti-Christ. Wycliffe said that salvation depended not upon obedience to any Pope or priest, but rather on divine grace and predestination and faith of the individual. He proclaimed "universal priesthood of believers" [1.] and denied the sacramental power of the clergy. Some of the sacraments he rejected altogether, and even attacked the theory of transubstantiation, denying any priestly miracles, but teaching that one does not actually partake of the body of Christ, but sees Him and communes with Him through faith and in spirit.

So we have this man voicing popular discontent with the state of the Papacy, and leading people on to further liberation, claiming that the Pope's claims were those of a usurper, and were blasphemous. At first he alarmed religious authority by political theories on the relation of Church and State; next, on the reformation of the Church itself; finally, he attacked dogmas and discussed the sacraments. If Wycliffe did go far in his suggestions for reform, and if there was confusion in his plan for society and the annihilation of its evils, he also contributed lasting and permanent stimuli which were to count, and to strengthen the Commons in England in the aim they already had--"to deminish the authority exercised over them by the Pope, and to loosen the ties that bound the kingdom to Rome." [2.] Wycliffe himself appealed to the king rather than the Pope declaring that "beside the Pope, and not below him, there is the king." [2.] No matter what the reasonings of this reformer by which he was sometimes carried to plans which we might not consider practical, it was his fundamental purpose to foster higher spiritual life which is felt through his life, teachings, and preachings; and which was to be felt years after. He was "the first dis-

1. Robinson, J.H.: History of Western Europe P. 564
2. Jusserand, J.J.: A Literary History of the English People P. 432

tinguished English scholar and reformer to repudiate the headship of the Pope and those practices of the Church of Rome,"[1] which a hundred and fifty years after his death were attacked by Luther in his revolt against the medieval Church.

In order to popularize and spread his doctrines, Wycliffe established a class of priests who were to go about doing good, and to improve by their example the worldly habits of the general run of priests and monks--to go about humbly without riches except those of the spirit. They went from village to village preaching, after training by Wycliffe, sent out to proclaim in simple language the good tidings of God; to awaken people to spiritual realities and cooperation in reform. They were often spoken of as "poor priests"; this fact shows us the emphasis placed on the lack of worldly luxury which Wycliffe was trying to contend with especially since he looked upon such wealth as a detriment, as it had proved. He justified these unlicensed preachers by the example of St. Paul who after conversion "Preechide fast, and axide noo leve of Peter herto, for he hadde leve of Jesus Crist."[2] The ire and scorn and attempted repression of these preachers expressed the strong influence they had, and showed the fear the Papacy and its followers had for the growing influence of such. It showed that the Papacy really had need to fear, because ideas were taking hold which would uproot their old strength.

Of Wycliffe, we may say truly "His mind was, above all, a critical one, opposed to formulas, to opinions without proofs, to traditions not justified by reason. Precedents did not overawe him, the mysterious authority of distant powers had no effect

[1] Robinson, James Harvey: History of Western Europe P. 373
[2] Jusserand, J.J.: A Literary History of the English People P. 426

on his feelings. He liked to look things and people in the face." [1] He wanted to teach others to see for themselves; he was afire with zeal, not selfishly, but with a zeal to overthrow the wrong. He felt that knowledge should not be only for those considered great, but for all. So he adopted the language of everyone, showing himself a true Englishman and, what proved so important afterwards, "a partisan of the system of free investigation so dear since to the race." [1]

Besides the channel of his "poor priests" Wycliffe was constantly using others such as preaching, teaching, and writing his beliefs and challenges. He prepared large numbers of sermons and tracts in English. He is the father of English prose. "The exquisite pathos, the keen, delicate irony, and the manly passion of his short, nervous sentences, fairly overmaster the weakness of the unformed language and give us English which cannot be read without a feeling of its beauty to this hour." [2] He had an elegance and a power of thought which was commanding. But there was another reason which made him considered such a great writer of the English language. The writing of this work was to serve as probably his greatest means of making it possible for the people to be enlightened and to use freedom of judgment.

This was his great work, the translation of the Bible which was to produce even more important results than violent lectures as a reformer. This Book was in the very language of common people greatly to the wrath of the hierarchy and political upholders. This was, indeed, his chief glory and his chief weapon in his fight for freedom. It was a unique appeal and could be made to a mass of people who were crying out in their souls for a new life. This English Bible can hardly be valued too highly--it was

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1. Jusserand, J.J.: A Literary History of the English People P.428
2. Robinson, J.H.: History of Western Europe P.373

the parent of later versions. "To Wyclif we owe more than to any one person who can be mentioned, our English language, our English Bible, and our reformed religion."[1] For the first time English readers could search the whole scriptures, and judge for themselves of doctrine and authority. Here they could learn how far the traditions and commandments of men had corrupted the truth. Thus, the greatest impulsion was given to a reformation in doctrine; and the inclusiveness and arrogance of the clergy received the first of many sledge-hammer blows that were to result in disruption. If all people were to understand and be converted, all must be reached directly. Wycliffe believed free investigation to be the right of each one. If the English people were to be the rulers of their land, they should be the rulers of their consciences, also. The Book of Truth was to be placed in everybody's hands so that individuals could freely know the interpretations of others, and could decide their own interpretations.

This translation, by Wycliffe and his disciples, of the Bible into the common tongue was a bold adventure. In the eyes of ecclesiastical authority it was considered the rankest heresy. The attitude of the Papacy with its fear was a testimony to the wisdom and success of Wycliffe in his use of the sacred weapons. It was a culmination in his carrer, the results of which were to reach far ahead. Yes, the Church tried to restrain the people laying hold more and more of the Bible and discovering the origins of Christian faith and order; it tried to forbid the laymen to possess any vernacular translations of the Scriptures. But efforts were fruitless; despite threats of individual prelates and synods of regions, the people were not going to stop studying

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[1] Ministers of the United Presbyterian Church, Graduates of the University of Glasgow: The Reformer: Lectures Delivered in St. James Church P. 46

the Bible first hand. And the more they did study, the more intense became their dissatisfaction with the Church. The Church knew it could not stand a searching; conditions were moving forward. People were not satisfied to be led blindly, but were being filled with a new spirit of inquiry and questioning. Wycliffe encouraged this still more. When the individual claimed freedom of thought in the religious realm it led to criticism of existing beliefs and schemes of church practice and even of government. The translations of the Bible did much to foster this. Men began to be their own interpreters of religious beliefs and opinions under this new spirit of freedom.

But we must not go too fast. It did not all develop at once. The Reformation came later. All people did not dare in the beginning to admit their new rights even though they felt them. The authority of the Church was too strong at first. But true it is there was discontent which was being grounded firmer and firmer by the factors we have mentioned; and there was some open declaration against old authority and injustice.

"....He fought the battle of his country's freedom with a power, persistency, and courage never surpassed and seldom equaled; ....he broke the might of huge superstitions that, for almost untold ages, had lain like a nightmare on immortal souls;... he taught men to repudiate the disastrous, paralysing delusion that the clergy are the Church, and lords of the human conscience;... securing for himself the foremost place in the long heroic succession of the Reformers he won also, for his country and ours, the honour of serving as the advanced guard of the noble army whose efforts resulted at last in the triumph of truth over error, of light over darkness, of freedom over slavery, and of humanity over priestcraft." [1.]

[1.] The Reformer: Lectures Delivered in St. James Church P. 46

"All honour to his memory that any attempt to trample on the independence of England provoked him to passionate protest and resistance, and that his very faith in God made it simply impossible for him to sit tamely by,......whilst the people were being wronged by foreign usurpation or domestic injustice. Wyclif was, to his praise be it said, an Englishman,....not unworthy of a place in the very front rank of those whose names,...suggest the memory of glorious battles fought and won in the cause of Britain's liberties."[1.]

Through this man's life and his reactions to life we see very vividly especially the religious backgrounds of the fourteenth century which were present also for Chaucer, and were moving him to write of them in this same century. Having the religious conditions in mind, we shall be interested to see Chaucer's accurate portrayal of them in his works. This man was to be active in his England, and to receive through his contacts much inspiration for his works.

Chaucer's Life--Influences that Advanced His Newness of Spirit

One of the great writers who gave expression in literature to the social, religious, and intellectual changes which marked the breaking-up of old and the beginning of the new was Geoffrey Chaucer. The England of his day was filled with activity and movement. Was he to adhere to the old in England, to the traditions, or was he to catch a vision of something in advance ? We shall see. Literature of the fourteenth century shows a diversity in language and a confusion of ideals and traditions that is characteristic of the times. Although when the century opened, London had not taken its place as a literary center, and literature was still local and not provincial, we find that before

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[1.] Ministers of the United Presbyterian Church, Graduates of the University of Glasgow: The Reformer: Lectures Delivered in St. James Church P. 29

this century had closed, something of order and unity had emerged; the Midland dialect had won an ascendency; and a really national literature had begun. It was Chaucer who played a decisive part in this transition. And although poets are probably not made by any mere outward training or environment, even the greatest poet's work is to some degree colored and shaped by surrounding influences. So, to understand better the direction taken by Chaucer's genius, it is not only appropriate but imperative that we know something of his life. "Until we know something of the life he led we cannot feel his charm."[1.]

It was the conditions of the time in which Chaucer lived, and the opportunities he was able to grasp in taking an active part, which gave him the desire, knowledge, ability, and experience to write the things he did write, and to use the language and spirit he chose. It is because these background conditions are so vital as determining forces in Chaucer's career that we need to spend time on them as a prelude to what followed. We must know not merely the great trend of the times, but Chaucer's part in this. Especially is it important to study the life of this particular writer before we know his work, because he took such an active part in the life of his day. He was a man of the world, not apart from it and withdrawn. This fact means that he gained much actual knowledge, ability, and experience, and many new ideas stimulated by his observation and activity; also, intangible values of understanding, appreciation, and power. His activity in life was not confined to one or two narrow provinces but encircled manifold spheres. Thus, his experience furnished him with a broad intelligence and range of judgment, and room for a free outlook, as well as an acquaintance with existing

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1. Jenks, Tudor, : In The Days of Chaucer P. 10

conditions. This extensive activity and liberality with all his wisdom was to serve him well as a means of enriching material for his writing, and was to be an inspiration.

We glimpse the diversity of his life and the consequence of it upon his works as we read; "Chaucer was admirably fitted for his future eminence by this varied life, so rich in adventure, --now with the chivalric hosts which conquered the armies of the French, and captured their king, --now in the English Court at the head of which was Edward the Third and his no less illustrious son, the Black Prince,--now in diplomatic service abroad, or sitting at the feet of the greatest scholars of the day, now an interested witness of the troublous times which ended in the deposition and tragical death of Richard the Second; and finally in aged and honorable retirement, writing from the rich fund of his varied experiences these inimitable Tales, which still, after the lapse of five centuries, are as fresh as a spring landscape after a shower." 1.

Among all the facts pertaining to Chaucer's career, a most important is that his environment was supremely suited to develop his genius. His temperament was quick to observe and to recognize; he was prompt to assimilate. In his works he described the life and manners of all ranks so vividly they live before us. He could do it so well and so accurately partly because he had the opportunity of knowing them and actually associating with them through his many contacts. He writes from life. Indeed, in studying Chaucer's biography, we must remember that we shall find some of the deepest and most significant influences upon his later work as a writer. Even while carrying out his public business, he could not help being susceptible to influences.

1. Carpenter, S. H.: English of the Fourteenth Century P. XI

in the air around him, and these were to shape his work, and determine his place as a poet. We are told that "probably no other poet of equal rank has ever led so active and varied a life; and it is because we find Chaucer in his poems so shrewd a man of the world, so astonishingly observant, and so good a judge of character that we take an interest in finding out how he obtained his experience." [1.] We see in his works a fullness made possible largely because of the abundant opportunities he was able to grasp to become familiar with people of various ranks, and because of the enlightenment gained regarding the life of his day.

Chaucer's life background is of such import it is hardly less characteristic of the new nation than his works are. His love of life in this world, and the participation of and enjoyment in contemporary activities rather than retreat to contemplate only the future world; his love of beauty, of nature, of people; his love of adventure, his humor; his democratic attitude, his spirit of freedom and joy in living,--all these bespeak characteristics in his biography which mark him as the poet of the new England. "His history is a sort of reduction of that of the English people at that day." [2.] They are enriched by trade, and Chaucer, the son of merchants, grows up under this atmosphere; the king wages war in France, and Chaucer follows; the people put more trust in Parliament, and Chaucer sits as a member for Kent. They take an interest in beauty and arts, and want them aglow with ornamentation; Chaucer is clerk of the king's works and superintends the repairs and embellishments of royal palaces. The new England is to laugh and smile, and be merry with song. "The England of

1. Pollard, Alfred: Chaucer's Canterbury Tales edited with notes and introduction Vol. I P. 21
2. Jusserand, J.J.: A Literary History of the English People P.267

laughter and the England of smiles are both in Chaucer's works."[1]

Geoffrey Chaucer, born in London about 1340, had a father who was a prosperous wine-merchant on Thames Street, and was also purveyor to Edward the Third, and had attended the king in an expedition to Flanders and Cologne. This poet, Chaucer, who was to leave such brightly-colored pictures of life, dress, and manners was born in the capital of the nation, the very focus of political, social, and commercial life of England. The narrow, crooked streets with all they contained were a school in all they furnished for the writer of contemporary life, but there were other surroundings to impress him, besides. We cannot read much in Chaucer without knowing how truly characteristic it is of him to say that he was to be lover of nature as well as a poet of man.

Keenly and deeply he is both--without his concern for them we would not have Chaucer. In medieval London the sky was not hidden nor walled, and the open fields were not far away. Chaucer spent the years of his childhood and youth in old picturesque London. His father's house was near the river on which ships from the Mediterranean and the Baltic glided along. Houses of several stories lined the water with warehouses where merchandise was landed. The famous London Bridge with all its piers, its houses, and chapel stood out against the horizon, and connected the city with the suburb of Southwark (the starting-place of Chaucer's pilgrims on their way to Canterbury in his Canterbury Tales). Here were houses and hostelries in abundance, since it was the arrival-place of those coming by land. Except for the suburb, this shore of the Thames offered a view of open

[1] Jusserand, J.J.: *A Literary History of the English People.* P. 268

country, trees, and green meadows. On the other side in the distance, rose the Tower, and farther, massive St. Paul's Cathedral. The town was surrounded by walls, at intervals in which gates opened on the country. London itself was populous and busy. The narrow streets in which Chaucer's childhood was spent showed indifference to cleanliness. In this city, among sailors and merchants, all the while acquiring a taste for adventure and tales of far lands, hearing his father describe beautiful things seen at Court, Chaucer grew up from a child to a youth.

Norman possibly by descent, and having sprung from a well-to-do family of the merchant class, his father's relation to the king no doubt helped Chaucer to be more easily connected with court life; for he was not born an aristocrat, but the son of a merchant. His father and other relatives were members of the Corporation of Wine Merchants or Vintners. It is fortunate that our poet was not born an aristocrat, for he would probably not have understood the lower orders, nor would he have received some of his boyhood experiences as son of a wine-merchant. These experiences helped to prepare him more fully to know the life of the high class as well as the lower.

Notwithstanding the fact that he was born of a humbler rank, he was destined to enter a higher life--that of the court, early. So, although of the burgher class, through court connections of the family or some kind of influence, he became probably when about seventeen years old, page to Elizabeth, Countess of Ulster, even the daughter-in-law of Edward the Third. As page in such a household he learned much of court life. From this time on, he was in almost constant touch with royalty. His posts held at different times in the king's household (such as valet of the king's chamber, the king's esquire, special messenger, and other services we shall mention) brought him more or less money, valua-

ble aid of various kinds, and experiences of inestimable purport.

Accordingly, our poet began his active and interesting life which we shall see he spent largely in public employment, at the same time making opportunity somehow to live in a world of thought and imagination, developing his genius. This early introduction to the court atmosphere was no small thing--it was a crucial point in the poet's career. The world was brilliant; adorned by ceremony, and echoing with chivalric deeds--the king had won the Battle of Poiters (1356). So Chaucer at this age when life was new and wonderful was transported to a new world, as it were, Outside was the plague-stricken England, the miserable land where men toiled and hungered, suffering from wind and rain in the fields. But, inside this world of Chaucer's now were ladies fair and great lords and singers; his world was the world of romance, and the Court, just now.

Even though the native English spirit was strengthening throughout the country, the tone of the Court now was still French. Queen Philippa enjoyed French poetry and romance. French princes kept beautiful richly illustrated books written in their native tongue. With Chaucer trained in a Court where even the king could hardly speak English, and with all of the French influence, we can see how Chaucer would have been likely to imitate the writings liked best by those around him, in his younger years, and how the first period of his literary activity has been called the French Period when he was under the control of French methods more than he was to be later. With the French literature as his models and the French poets as his masters, no wonder when he began to write first, addressing a courtly group whose tastes and sympathies were French that he followed

their manner. He was not to be bound by their conventions, however. His newness is shown to us more clearly because he refused to be ruled wholly by tradition, and he broke away to originality and freedom rather than to remain under the full control of old laws.

His was an eventful career and a varied one. Even before he was twenty, he was to take part in something of a different nature than mere court life. Chaucer was with the English army against the French (1359), probably as one of Prince Lionel's Suite. What material to stir the imagination and enlarge a poet's conception and experience! These were the days when war was characterized with a pomp which poets might dream about and desire to see. Here was Chaucer. Froissart says that as the king's army went through France it seemed to fairly cover the country and the soldiers were so richly armed and apparelled that it was a wonder and pleasure to see the shining arms. In the mighty army were the King, the Black Prince, and some of the greatest knights of the age. Chaucer was taken prisoner, but ransomed finally by the king, and after his return he entered the king's service. He was granted a pension as valet in the king's service, fulfilling such duties as making the royal bed, holding torches, and carrying messages; and later to the position of esquire, serving the prince at the table and riding after him in his journeys. Again he took part in a campaign in France (1369); and before 1379 he had been employed on as many as seven diplomatic missions to various places on the Continent--France, Italy, and Flanders. His missions were concerned with various questions. They involved matters of war, of commerce, and even of the king's marriage, and others which were secret matters.

Chaucer's own marriage, probably about 1366, further connected him with court life, for Philippa Chaucer was in the service of the royal household also, and received an annual pension, and gifts for her services. Chaucer's standing at court probably helped to give him opportunities to go abroad which were to mean much for the development of his art. Although his early training was under French influence, later diplomatic missions took him to Italy where he felt keenly the new spirit we shall speak of more at length before we are through. He was capable as a business man, -- yes. He went to France, Italy, and elsewhere on private missions for the king who gave him money in return and promoted him to honor. Throughout his life he seems to have had an opportunity to know the world at Court. Yet he knew more of life than merely that; his military service, his travels, his duties in London brought him into touch with all classes socially. He was active and capable in public office.

But his duties, many as they were, did not absorb all his thoughts. He did take time to think of something besides this work. There were other sides to his nature. Successful as he was in official offices, his career was to be in a different field. We must mention Chaucer's love of books, and his knowledge of them if we are to consider his complete life with its interests. Indeed, it is a marvel that in such a busy life as his he made time for so much reading. But in the midst of his busy life he looks to his books for rest and enjoyment. Sad or restless he turns to a book:

> "To rede, and drive the night away.." [1]

He tells us that after a busy day at the Custom House in London,

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[1] Skeat, W.W.: The Student's Chaucer P. 84, Line 49

he would go home and sit at another book than an account book as "dombe as any stoon."[1] He found time to read many books and even to write poems. We see in his poems reminiscences of reading; he reveals his delight. He studied Latin; he read French works in fashion in the society which he moved in. He had strong perseverance and enthusiasm and was perhaps his own best teacher. Significant is the fact that Chaucer was fitting himself so well to perform a great task,--fitting himself through his active public career, and was gaining a broad knowledge of and acquaintance with the times; it is just as significant, though, that courtier, soldier, or diplomat that he was, he was beginning, too, his poet's work.

In 1372 Chaucer was sent on his early diplomatic mission to Italy. He was abroad nearly a year visiting Florence and Genoa. His journeys to Italy had a profound influence upon his works and the development of his genius. His ability as a practical man of affairs was to lead him to opportunity of association with the early Renaissance of Italy. Here he was brought directly under the unfluence of the New Learning that was to "re-create the mind of Europe."[2]

Remember, this was the century of three of Italy's greatest poets--Dante, who had died; Petrarch, and Boccaccio, living near Padua and Florence. In various departments the new love for beauty was active here--the movement was general. Chaucer found fresh colors, and he tells us that so far as he possibly could he saw, heard, and learned as much as he was able while on his journeys in contact with the new spirit. He arrived without any preconceived ideas curious to find what occupied men's minds, as

[1] Skeat, W.W.: The Student's Chaucer P. 333, Line 656
[2] Pancoast, H.: Representative English Literature from Chaucer to Tennyson P. 31

attentive as on the threshold of the House of Fame:

> "For certeynly, he that me made
> To comen hider, seyde me,
> I shulde bothe here and see,
> In this place wonder thinges...
> For yit peraventure, I may lere
> Some good ther-on, or sumwhat heré, 1.
> That leef me were, or that I wente."

Chaucer's was a nature susceptible naturally to such charm and fascination as was in the air. His mind, from infancy was friendly to art and books. How could he help being touched fundamentally by such new expansion as he found in Italy ? It was a "literary springtime" too penetrating to be of no effect. Before his journeys he was ignorant of the Italian literature; afterwards, he knew Italian and had read the great classic authors; Boccaccio, Petrarch, and Dante. Their work haunts him, and he ceases to take the French as his literary ideal. Although he had known the classics before his journey, now he spoke of them with a changed tone--a tone of veneration; one ought to kiss their "steppes." 2. He expressed himself about them something as Petrarch did, with so great a resemblance it has seemed to some like an echo of conversations they might have had together, if Chaucer had seen the great Petrarch while on his mission, near Padua in Italy.

There used to be authorities who said that the meeting seemed probable, and that on the occasion of this reference it seemed as if the poet meant to preserve the memory of a personal intercourse, when the clerk of Oxford in the Canterbury Tales says:

> " I wol you telle a tale which that I
> Lerned at Padua of a worthy clerk...
> He is now deed and nayled in his chests...
> Fraunceys Petrark, the laureat poet." 3.

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1. Skeat, W.W.: The Student's Chaucer P. 345, Lines 1890-1999
2. Jusserand, J.J.: A Literary History of the English People P. 288
3. Skeat, W.W.: The Student's Chaucer P. 596, Lines 26 - 27 and Line 29 and 40.

But this hypothesis which was believed originally is no longer tenable and authorities now tell us that it was impossible for these two to have met in Italy at that time. However, the important fact for us in this study is that Chaucer read the works of Petrarch and others, and through these felt the influence which was to arouse and kindle him with new fervor. We know that he made an extensive acquaintance with manuscripts which were to arouse a new enthusiasm, and to be a flaming spirit to Chaucer.

Indeed, the French were no longer the literary leaders of Europe. Italy had turned from the Middle Ages towards the new world. Chaucer passed into the realm of the South from the North; into the land of the artist and scholar from the land of the knights; into the world of Petrarch and Boccaccio, from the trouvère of the French. He found in the new world a devotion to beauty which was to be characteristic of the era to come, in architecture, in painting, and in literature. He found, in literature, enthusiasm for the masterpieces of antiquity. Chaucer was the first great poet of England to feel the spell of Italy exercised over other English writers up through Shakespeare and Browning. His very work is a testimony as to the evident impression made upon him by his Italian journeys.

After his return to England from his memorable visit in 1373 or thereabouts, there were other marks of royal favor shown to Chaucer. He was yet to live an active public life. He was not now to retire to dream all day of his new inspiration. True, on his business trip to Italy, he had found inspiration for himself and his country; and true it is that he did not forget about it, but did dream about, and use it. However, he did this in addition to leading an active public life, as we

shall see.

In 1374, while living over one of the city gates he was given a position partly through the goodwill of John of Gaunt in the Custom House at London. The location of his habitation over one of the chief gates of the city gave a remarkable opportunity for first-hand acquaintance with people at large. But in this position he was to find greater opportunities. He was appointed Comptroller of Customs and Subsidy of Wools, Skins, and Hides in the Port of London. For the first ten of the twelve years he served he was obliged, according to his oath, to write the accounts and draw up the rolls of receipts in his own hand. "Ye shall swere that...ye shall write the rolles by your owne hand..."[1] The sheets of parchment were immense, fastened together one after the other, making the rolls. It was necessary for Chaucer to be present at the weighing and verifying of merchandise; for him to enter the name of the owner, the quality and the quantity of the produce taxed, and the amount which should be collected; endless "rekeninges."[1] Any defrauders were fined. Chaucer, poet though he was, detected a man who was dishonest trying to ship wool without paying the required duty; the wool was confiscated and sold, and the fine the man had to pay was presented to Chaucer. His post was important, requiring care, shrewdness, and vigilance.

Soon after this, John of Gaunt made Chaucer a grant for life in reward for the service rendered by him and by his wife. In fact, John of Gaunt, as we suggested in another place was an important force in Chaucer's life both in affecting his position in life, and in influencing his works. We shall know how much he could

[1] Jusserand, J.J.: A Literary History of the English People P.20

mean either for or against Chaucer when we remember that he was supremely powerful. Thus, it is significant to know that he was a devout friend of Chaucer who was his own age. The friendship of these two was long and faithful through life. Even when John of Gaunt incurred the anger of the people at times, Chaucer stood by although he brought the ill-will of some upon himself for doing so. It is a fact that when John of Gaunt was middle-aged, he married the sister of Chaucer's wife; so Chaucer became a near relative of John of Gaunt. When the latter was in power, he never forgot Chaucer; and Chaucer was faithful to his friend even if it meant suffering.

After Chaucer's grant was received in acknowledgement of his services and his wife's he was sent on more missions to France and elsewhere. It was about 1378 that he went abroad to help arrange a marriage between Richard the Second and a daughter, Madame Marie, of the French king. About this time, also, business took him again to Italy where he visited the Lord of Milan. The long succession of such commissions Chaucer held for the king, the Court, and Parliament was valuable in enlarging and completing his knowledge both of England and its people, and of other lands and peoples. Soon Chaucer was given the custody by the king of a rich ward from whom he received a large amount of money at the ward's marriage.

From around 1379 on, Chaucer ceased to journey on the Continent and lived an English life in England. He saw several aspects of that life which he had not known from personal experience. In 1382 he became Comptroller of the Petty Customs at London; he was allowed to turn over some of his duties to a

deputy, which meant a great deal to Chaucer who made use of every minute. In 1385, probably while living at Greenwich, he was made Justice of the Peace for Kent. "After having been page, soldier, prisoner of the French, squire to the king, negotiator in Flanders, France, and Italy, he entered Westminster the first of October, 1386 as a member of Parliament,"[1] for the Shire of Kent. It was one of the great sessions, and one of the most stormy. The ministers of Richard the Second were impeached. Evidently for remaining faithful to his protectors, the king and John of Gaunt, Chaucer was looked at with ill favor by those in power, and being among the victims of the political change going on, lost his position and was in want. However, he sat in the House of Commons as representative of Kent and supported the ministers on John of Gaunt's side. But at the end of three years, Richard, after dismissing the Council which Parliament had imposed upon him, took authority into his own hands and Chaucer "the poet, the soldier, the member of Parliament, and diplomat"[1] was appointed Clerk of the Royal Works (1389). In this position he had to take care of constructions and repairs at Westminster, the Tower, St. George's Chapel, Windsor and many other castles he described with:

> "Pinacles, imageries, and tabernacles,
> Ful eek of windowes
> As flakes falle in grete snowes."[2]

He was, too, on a commission for repairing the banks of the Thames between Woolwich and Greenwich. He managed the erection of scaffolding for jousts at Smithfield, was appointed a forester

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1. Jusserand, J.J.: A Literary History of the English People
   P. 312
2. Jusserand, J.J.: A Literary History of the English People
   P. 313

(of North Petherton Park, Somersetshire). All in all, his income from his duties must have been substantial; and the variety of his work testifies that he was efficient in public employment. The opportunity of meeting and dealing with all kinds and conditions of men would be appreciated fully by Chaucer's temperament. And this active life of his contributed to his great work as a writer.

The mentioning of these various public offices which Chaucer filled is more than a mere catalogue of facts. These activities are potent with meaning in regard to his works; they were enlarging the range and possibility of his genius. All these experiences broadened him; he not only read, but he saw much; he had traveled a great deal, and had come in contact with new thoughts and ideas, and with forces that were to be the forces of a new world; he had seen his fellow patriots at work at their business personally, and politically, and he was keenly observant; he had seen them, too, in their palaces and in their shops. "Merchants, sailors, knights, pages, learned men of Oxford and suburban quacks, men of the people and men of the Court, laborers, citisens, monks, priests, sages, and fools, heroes and knaves, had passed in crowds beneath his scrutinizing gaze"[1.] More than only gazing at them, "he had associated with them, divined them, and understood them; he was prepared to describe them all."[1.] What a source for this poet's expanding genius.

There is one influence which was so deep and consequential in Chaucer's life and works we ought to consider its characteristics more fully. This is the new spirit. Representatives of the new feeling who are significant in studying Chaucer especially are three. They are worth considering.

[1.] Exact source unknown.

A new learning was at hand--it had already begun in Italy. The Revival of Learning also falls in Chaucer's century. A liberation of the intellect had begun in which Chaucer himself shared. It was twenty years before the birth of Chaucer that Dante had died, leaving in his Divine Comedy a supreme expression of medieval Christendom. It is true that he summed up the Age of Faith in his epic. Yet the deep currents of the life of the day that were silently but surely affecting a change in affairs of the world affected his thoughts, his dreams, and even his deeds. Although Dante's sympathy with the Middle Ages was deep, he was, nevertheless, of the new birth. Individuality is supreme in his poetry; his concern with secular problems of his day is not that of a medievalist; in religion he held that peace was to be attained by ethical rather than supernatural means. He saw new paths that were opening for men; he was possessed with a zeal for knowledge--he was the most profound scholar of his time. He saw, even if dimly, new realms along the horizon. What if he saw the new world indistinctly ? It is the direction of a man's gaze which is of chief importance.

Petrarch and Boccaccio were contemporaries of Chaucer. To both he was indebted. Petrarch, the poet and scholar, the great pioneer in the new way of thinking, was crowned with laurel at Rome a year after Chaucer's birth. Since it was the influence of the Italian Renaissance spirit, and of these two men especially which is significant in shaping and enlarging Chaucer's possibilities and contribution in literature, and since we are here considering Chaucer in the light of one inspired by the new spirit, and in turn being able to inspire others to feel it, it is directly valuable that we take time

to know something of this new enriching power coming to the fore, already seen in Italy especially through these two men both of whom we shall consider again later in regard to their contact with chaucer, and the inspiration of their work.

A good understanding of the place of these men will lead us to a better appreciation of Chaucer. It is on his journeys to Italy that he came into contact with the new beauty which was to characterize the Renaissance, and that he was inspired to portray the new spirit in his works. These journeys with their contacts were thus directly of great bearing in any consideration of Chaucer and his work. We have, indeed, touched upon a great source of power which was to set free his own spirit and originality. We shall speak of the journeys to Italy and their meaning when we consider Chaucer's works, also. Here, let us get a background of Petrarch and Boccaccio--exemplars of the new spirit in Italy which was to come so close to Chaucer that it not only touched him, but inflamed him.

Before Petrarch (1304-1374), it is said that the world was essentially medieval. With him, the modern world is said to have begun. Some of his predecessors were fore-runners of the Renaissance, but he may be called its founder. Others previous to him had held a modern point of view as their own possession, but had not communicated it to society at large. They had not been able to make it a power in the world. But Petrarch kindled zeal and inspiration in others; he inspired them to think as modern men; he encouraged free inquiry; the attempt to appraise things justly by using the critical faculty which had been ignored through the Middle Ages; he encouraged men to see some-

thing of the beauty of the world; to regard the present life as worth-while. Something about Petrarch's spirit made this new spirit spread and become a living force. It is in this place even rather than in his poetry, in spite of his exquisite sonnets, that his historical importance lies. It is with this man and in his time that the Renaissance takes definite shape. His sonnets will be a landmark in Italian literature; they have intrinsic merits and they are a contribution to the development of the Italian language. But it is as the chief initiator of the Renaissance that Petrarch was famous, exerting potent influences at a time which was one of the most critical. It is as such that we are especially interested in him as he touched Chaucer. We must talk of Petrarch in studying Chaucer and his newness which was advanced especially through his interest in the Renaissance spirit. Petrarch with his modern gaze and the spirit he kindled vitally influenced Chaucer.

As to Boccaccio of Italy, he is said to be one to whom Chaucer is indebted more than to any poet but Ovid. Chaucer gave much time to the Latin classics and they share the honor somewhat of setting him free from bonds of convention. Boccaccio wrote of the outward and common life of his day. He was less imbued with the classic spirit than Petrarch--he lacked the elevation and dignity of the older scholar. He was more of an Italian of his day; he delighted in movement, gaiety and vivacity of the court. The romantic rather than the tragic held him. However, several things contribute to the importance of Boccaccio (1313-1375). He did make adventures in different directions--he was something of an innovator. Boccaccio's Filocapo is indicative of the transition from the medieval metrical romance to the prose novel of modern times. His Ameto is said to be the

first real pastoral romance since the Middle Ages; it opened a delightful vein in literature. Fiammetta, perhaps the most striking picture of the passions of love the Renaissance knew, pointed out the field of the psychological novel, although it was to be uncultivated for a long time. But his popularity rests upon the Decameron. In connection with Chaucer we are interested in this piece. In it, is found variety of incident, and skilfulness in plot; the narrative is said to be rather witty. But although we are told there is something of eloquence, poetry is said to be lacking. The characters do not seem like living people; the work lacks the things that concern human society vitally. It is here that Chaucer goes beyond the medieval conventions and infuses in his work a spirit of lifelikeness. If he takes conventional material he endows it with originality and genius of his own, refusing to be limited by narrow old-time restrictions. Boccaccio's piece has a beautiful framework and shows the work of a master; it bubbles with merriment; it speaks of the life of the day--it is licentious. Its style is one of exceptional beauty in spite of a lack of nobility of thought. Boccaccio spread the humanistic spirit throughout the middle class of Italy by giving expression to it in Italian. In his Decameron, in prose tales, he was pointing out the "fresh and careless pleasure in love, laughter, and the beauty of this world" [1] that would characterize the Italy of the Renaissance.

In fact, Dante, Petrarch, and Boccaccio are famed chiefly as the great "Pioneers and permanent luminaries of Italian literature." [1] Dante's Divine Comedy placed him among the half dozen world poets whose works belong to every nation. Though

[1] Thatcher and Schwill: Europe in the Middle Age. P. 620

he gloriously inaugurated Italian literature, he is said not to have been a modern man because he was within a circle of medieval conceptions and bowed to the worship of authorities characteristic of the Middle Age. But it is only with Dante at the beginning of the fourteenth century that Italian literature get well started. And Dante displayed close personal interest in the Roman past which is one of the chief features of the Italian Renaissance, and even in the Divine Comedy are many allusions to ancient history and pagan mythology. However, Dante, who may be said to have stood on the threshold of the Renaissance, was the first great man in the Middle Ages who stood out by himself, "unconnected with any corporate body or institution." [1] He used to boast that he was his own party. But, in reality, Dante was not imbued with the modern spirit and had not emancipated himself from the ideas of his time, though he had raised himself above them. "Dante stands on the threshold of the Renaissance," [2] even if he was rather the last giant of the Middle Ages than the herald of a new epoch.

Dante was followed by Petrarch whose sonnets have influenced literary form in all countries; whose passionate devotion to the literature and liberty of the ancients marks him the first of Italian humanists. This is the man who may be regarded as the one who opened the Italian Renaissance. Like Dante, he was a citizen of Florence, the intellectual center of Italy and the home of many geniuses of the Renaissance. There had been interest in learning before Petrarch but it was more restricted before to a small circle and was not vigorous. The Renaissance dates from the time interest in learning was more general--in Petrarch's time. He himself did much to encourage it. "Petrarch is the

[1] Lodge, : The Close of the Middle Ages P.522
[2] Lodge, : The Close of the Middle Ages P.523

first prominent apostle of classicism or--as he had been called in virtue of this fact--the first modern man." [1]

Petrarch credited personality and experience. His attitude towards the medieval inheritance of thought and of institutions fore-shadowed those who were not to blindly believe, but rather were to examine and criticise. No man before Petrarch took so direct a pleasure in the good things of the earth, its fields and flowers. The old impulse in regard to nature and her phenomena as manifestations of the Evil One lost zest, with Petrarch. Perhaps he was the first man in centuries who climbed a mountain for the mere delight of the journey. In 1335 he made the arduous ascent of Mount Ventoux, France. The event deserves to be set down as a milestone in intellectual history. "The qualities of the man and his creed of life distinctly mark him as a new type." [1] Although similar qualities already had appeared in Dante and others, it was with Petrarch that they first showed a vigorous life. Think of the influence of such a man upon Chaucer.

Boccaccio became a friend of Petrarch's and shared with him most of his tastes and interests, and was, like him, an enthusiast of antiquity. Boccaccio was a modern man. He was perhaps a greater original genius than Petrarch. His famous Italian work, The Decameron, was free from restraint and naively sensuous, as if Christianity had not intervened between it and Greek Mythology. The imagination displayed in this work and its humor and grace always held the world captive, but its excesses were more than print would always support. "The humerous and satirical writer throws his dart at every class....but the rebuke directed at the clergy has a particular edge and relish." [2]

1. Thatcher and Schwill: Europe in the Middle Age P. 620
2. Thatcher and Schwill: Europe in the Middle Age P. 624

The ignorant monk, the sensual priest, are the standing butt of the tales. Could respect for the Church stand long in a country where the Decameron was read with such gusto ? The Inquisition of the sixteenth century recognized the danger of the book and put it upon the Index, not for its immorality, but for its anticlericalism. Whether we praise or blame the piece, an imperishable honor remains: "as the Divine Comedy founds Italian poetry, so the Decameron founds Italian prose." [1] In it was shown contempt for superstition, and a delight in life which were alien to the spirit of the Middle Ages. Through Chaucer and other writers Boccaccio has influenced the whole of later English literature.

It was not that Chaucer merely borrowed plots or lines or words from these great men which was so important, but that he felt the new spirit which awoke in him and increased the possibilities of greater things. There was a notable improvement in Chaucer's work after he had come under the influence of Italian literature on repeated visits; there was development in literary powers and there was prominence of Italian literary influences. His period filled with important public business in foreign lands gave knowledge, but more than this, inspiration and awakening. It gave him opportunity for culture; it added to his appreciation of human nature; it made him acquainted with men and letters on the Continent, and opened more fully to him the wealth of Italian and perhaps of classical literature. We may suppose that he was already well acquainted with the style and the works of French writers but that now he was to widen his

[1] Thatcher and Schwill: Europe in the Middle Ages. P. 624

knowledge to embrace all European literature.

"His masters in his art were.....above all, the Italians, Dante, Petrarch, and Boccaccio........The break between Layamman and the Old English writers before the Conquest is not greater than the break between Chaucer and his predecessors, and the break proceeded in each case from the same cause, the enlargement of the literary horizon and the adoption of new forms and subjects and ideas under foreign influence." [1.] Indeed, these journeys to Italy must rank as most important events in Chaucer's life, and we see new energy with which he devoted himself to poetry after his return from intimate acquaintance with the Italian of Dante, Petrarch, and Boccaccio. Chaucer's life in Italy gave him literary breadth, independence, and ideals. It is just these influences of Italy with its emphasis on the new spirit in thought and living which played so great a part in encouraging Chaucer, the man and thepoet, to overthrow and leave conventional mechanical means as such, and to dare to be himself and use originality and freedom in spirit and in form. It is his characteristics of such newness which we shall speak of more before we are through as exhibiting his appreciation of the new which was shown in his love of life and beauty and liberation from narrowness.

"It was inevitable that for a time he should be greatly under its influence, even though certain French modes and influences abode with him until the end, and though the difference between his two masters tended finally to free him from the domination

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1. Chambers's Cyclopedia of English Literature Vol.I, P. 59

of both and to leave him independent" [1] "A brightness of remember'd splendour comes into all his best work after his visit to Italy" [2] We may say that by far the most important force acting upon him during the middle period of his literary life was that coming from Italy. In this respect his journey to Genoa, 1372, as mentioned already, had an importance other than commercial or political. "That was a journey that made an epoch in his artistic development." [3] And we know that it affected his whole life as well as his literary development. The influence of the Italian poets is beyond question; and it is not to be measured, we need to re-emphasize, by what he borrowed in plot, incident, or expression. It was more profound than these debts suggest. "It recreated him as an artist, giving him a new and loftier conception of artistic form and beauty. This regeneration is soon visible in the improvement of his style--in its growing dignity and shapeliness. It is strikingly indicated by his metrical progress." [3]

"From a literary point of view, the period of his birth was remarkable for the strong influence of Italian lètters, which ...found its way into England" [3] Dante had produced the greatest poem known to modern Europe and the most imaginative ever written. "Thus the Italian sky was blazing with splendour." [4] Boccaccio was writing poems which were to suggest plans to Chaucer. Petrarch, from whom Chaucer is said to have learned

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1. The Encyclopedia Americana P. 362
2. Masefield, John: Chaucer P. 22
3. Chamers's Cyclopedia of English Literature P. 136
4. Coppee Henry: English Literature Considered as an Interpreter of English History P. 61

a story or two in Italy "was also a star of the first magnitude in that Italian galaxy." [1] In the time of Chaucer this Italian influence marked extended relations of English letters, and served to remove trammels of the French, giving to the growing English the opportunity of development which it had waited for so long. From that time to a later period, many great products of English poetry "have been watered by silver rills of imaginative genius from a remote Italian source." [2]

"The new learning of Italy colors the verse of Chaucer, and mingles with its........hues," It is obvious that the journeys to Italy were an important part of Chaucer's life, not only to himself but to all literature. "It was Chaucer who let the fresh winds of heaven into that over-perfumed and over-privileged enclosure." [4] Chaucer really opens the list of illustrious poets who have been deeply aroused by Italy. He went there on a political mission to become acquainted at the very source with the new literary culture that was "to make young again the poetry of the world." [5] Chaucer's trips abroad were on diplomatic business but these voyages meant much for literature, also. The most important results are those which we cannot point out or demonstrate, but which are fore-shadowed.

"Late in the fourteenth century the mind of England became greatly stimulated and directed by an influence from without. England began to share in the Renaissance or the awakening of the mind of Europe to a new culture, a fresh delight in life, and in beauty, a new enthusiasm for freedom in thought and action. This great movement first took shape in Italy. Nation

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1. Coppee, Henry: English Literature Considered as an Interpreter of English History P.61
2. Coppee, Henry: English Literature Considered as an Interpreter of English History P.62
3. Pancoast, H.S.: Representative English Literature From Chaucer to Tennyson P.30
4. Gosse, E.: Modern English Literature--A Short History P.22
5. Chaucer Society: Essays on Chaucer, Vol I VI, Part I, P. 7

after nation kindled with the ardor of the new spirit, and England, as the rest, drew from Italy knowledge and inspiration. Education in England was transformed by men who learned in Florence and in Bologna what they taught at Oxford or at Cambridge..."[1] What an atmosphere for Chaucer to enter and what opportunities before him! "In Italy, he met the Renaissance in its flowering, and saw works of great and confident design carried to splendid completion. He saw what Art could be under the influence of the Sun, and felt a power everywhere about him far greater than the fantasies of the Romance of the Rose"[2]

"When Chaucer went to Italy the new light of the Renaissance--just arisen--beamed in brilliant splendor from intellectual summits of time. The mist through which the Middle Ages had looked on classical antiquity was beginning now to clear away and to the anxious eye appeared an unexpected fullness of richest life in ever-widening circumference; whilst that which was already known, now being seen in clearer outlines, took possession of mind and heart with irresistible might. The powerful movement in culture of the epoch which prepared a regeneration of thought and poetry and action for mankind in Europe, is connected mainly with three great names -- Dante, Petrarch, and Boccacio."[3]

The trips to Italy constitute a significant part of Chaucer's life and he was affected directly through them. It is an especially important period since the influences he met helped him to overthrow the conventional and developed newness in him, as in his age. "The Renaissance, in its broadest signification, is the name given the new civilization, which gradually

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1. Pancoast, H.S.: Representative English Literature--from Chaucer to Tennyson P.5
2. Masefield, John: Chaucer P. 3,4
3. Ten Brink: History of English Literature P. 50

displaced in the minds of men, the medieval conception of the state, of society, of art and of philosophy. It was a revolution in the realm of thought, comparable to that which occurred when the antique world fell before Christianity......The Renaissance began to marshal its forces in the fourteenth century, and is essentially, a conquest by the mind of man of provinces which the Middle Age either avoided from fear or ignored from indifference."[1] How rich a time. What an experience to come in Chaucer's life, and to come early enough so that he would have time to enjoy its benefits in his life and in his work. Revolution of thought which was to result in action! The old medieval conceptions being displaced in men's minds. A conquest by man's mind of provinces avoided and feared in the old Middle Age! What joy for Chaucer to come in touch with forces beginning thus, and leading in such directions. His very personality seemed to be one which would gladly cling to such freedom. The old medieval civilization had bound the forces of human society; especially had the Church persistently limited scope. But there were signs that men would soon begin to credit personal experience rather than to obey merely the dictates of blind authority. (Wycliffe illustrated this.) Hand in hand with the spirit of individualism went the study of nature which was the foundation of sciences and the "mother of inventions." Ignorance with superstition had been characteristic of the medieval period. But with more opportunity for knowledge, understanding, and light, people were not to be satisfied with the old way. We know with what ill will the Church regarded freedom of inquiry and scientific research, always being ready with the charge of heresy. Such literature as had existed was in a language which closed it to many. And thus ignorance was accompanied by superstition.

1. Thatcher and Schwill: Europe in the Middle Age. P. 616

"The period of the Renaissance, in its proper and most comprehensive meaning, may be regarded as the age in which the social and political system of the Middle Ages came to an end, in which medieval restriction upon liberty of thought and inquiry were abolished. It may be said to begin in the thirteenth century, to be in full progress during the fourteenth...." [1] The "revival of literature and art was not only a stimulus to intellectual progress and a deathblow to ignorance and superstition; it also marks a great step in the freedom of the individual from medieval restrictions." [2] When we analyze, we find the results upon Chaucer as an individual are great. His very life and his very work especially his great piece, The Canterbury Tales, which exhibits his freedom and originality, speak for his newness and his overthrow in general of conventional limitations. The period in which these tales were written was the time when he dared to be himself. The writing of such a poem concerning present-day life in this world with its pleasures and experiences, written in the way he did it, was a proof of his growing freedom from conventionalities. And the period in which he wrote it exhibits characteristics we shall later consider which point to Chaucer as one who was adopting spirit and style which were to liberate him. "The sun of spiritual enfranchisement was beginning to appear above the horizon, and the darkness of the previous ages was slowly fading before its powerful rays." [3]

What an influence for Chaucer to meet these new forces in his life,--in this fourteenth century which witnessed in Italy a revival of classical learning under Boccaccio who became a

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1. Lodge: The Close of the Middle Ages P. 518
2. Lodge: The Close of the Middle Ages P. 522
3. Gilman, Arthur: The Poetical Works of Geoffrey Chaucer P. XIX

public interpreter of Dante, as he already had been the first to make known anew the faithfulness of a Troilus, the fickleness of a Cressida, and the unfailing obedience of a Griselda, all of which was to be transplanted into our literature by the poet of the Canterbury Pilgrimage, who "re-illumined the torch of his poetic fervor at the altars of Italian genius."[1.] Although the full development of the Renaissance did not appear until after Chaucer's time, long before that, various signs of its coming were perceptible, and active discontent was shown, and evidences of disintegration of medieval manners and morals were to the fore. "There are plenty of opportunities for observing at once the decline of the old order and the rise of the new."[2.]

We can see how the events of Chaucer's life were a valuable background for him as a man and as a poet, especially in broadening him and directing him away from merely traditional to belief and practice in that which was characteristic of newness and the breaking away from the old. "Geoffrey Chaucer appeared a man of mark, inventive though a disciple, original though a translator, who by his genius, education and life, was enabled to know and to depict a whole world."[3.] It was largely the life with its opportunities offered him as a man of the world which made possible the contacts which meant much to his literary development. In fact, his life and works are closely related, and influences upon his life are reflected through his works. Thus in considering one we are studying something of importance in consideration of the other. "A new spirit, almost manly, pierces through in literature as in painting, with Chaucer as

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1. Gilman, Arthur: The Poetical Works of Geoffrey Chaucer P.XXI
2. Boynton, P.H.: London in English Literature P. 15
3. Taine, H.A.: History of English Literature P. 105

with Van Eck, with both at the same time; no longer the childish imitation of chivalrous life or monastic devotion, but the grave spirit of inquiry and craving for deep truths, whereby art becomes complete."[1]

Chaucer himself was a man respected and trusted by the community, a faithful and competent public servant. He was evidently a men of recognized judgment and ability, a polished gentleman and a witty companion. "It is marvelous that in such a busy official life as Chaucer undoubtedly led he would have had the time to make such a notable contribution to English poetry."[2] "If character may be devined from works, he was a good man, genial, sincere, hearty, temperate of mind.....thoroughly humane, and friendly with God and man."[3] From Chaucer's writings we can learn still more about his mind and his characters. The Canterbury Tales tell us of his democratic spirit. "For, he knew life and loved it, and his specialty was mankind."[4] It was indeed that that placed Chaucer in public business, and that with his practical talents brought him so many occupations in such variety. Chaucer had a great enthusiasm for life in this world, and the society of fellow-creatures whether high or low, "for real men and women, knights and summoners, millers and parsons, monks and merchants, delicate cloistered ladies and boistrous wives of Bath. Whatever was good of its kind was a delight to him."[5]

It was due largely to Chaucer's relationship with an active participation in civil and state affairs, "as stimulating and

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1. Taine, H.A.: History of English Literature P. 126
2. Holt, L.H.: The Leading English Poets from Chaucer to Browning P. 836
3. Backus--Brown: The Great English Writers P.13
4. Kittredge, G.L.: Chaucer and His Poetry P.2
5. Kittredge, G.L.: Chaucer and His Poetry P. 32

determining agencies"[1] that Chaucer's poetical genius gave to us, in such a work as the Canterbury Tales a better idea of what kind of people lived in England in the fourteenth century "than do all the theories of that period which have been written."[1] In fact, of his great poem, John Richard Green says, "'Taken as a whole the poem is the work not of a man of letters, but of a man of action. He has received his training from war, courts, business, travel---a training not of books, but of life.'"[2] His tales could hardly have been written by one without the wide relationship and dealings with all kinds and conditions of men which Chaucer had in his numerous positions of civil service found; often he bore a part on diplomatic missions along with men far superior in rank. His life was one of hard work, and it was his thoroughness that enabled him to produce so much that is permanent. His activity combined various influences. While his intercourse with foreign nations gave character to his education, on the other hand, his positions in his own native country as a member of Parliament and in the office of Customs' Inspector brought him into relations with his fellow-countrymen. The various elements often interweave in his work. We can see at how many points he touched the varied brilliant life of his own time, and how he knew it not just as an onlooker, but as an actor in its activities. "As courtier, office-holder, soldier, ambassador, legislator, burgher of London, Chaucer knew everybody that was worth knowing....It is hard to imagine a career so thoroughly adapted to fit him for the great task for which he came into the world. No man can have a broader or more intimate acquaintance

1. Corson, Hiram: Selections from Canterbury Tales P.XVII
2. Corson, Hiram: Selections from Canterbury Tales P.XVIII

with the life of the time. All this did not make him a poet, for genius comes only by the grace of God; but it trained him for the appointed application of his powers--which was that he should record the age, in its habit as it lived, with every significant detail"[1] Chaucer had unparralleled opportunities for observation which his temperament made it possible for him to use to the best advantage. He had a deep sense of the joy, beauty, sadness, and irony of human life.

Chaucer took great pleasure himself in the birds and flowers and brooks; "in the sunshine on the grass or as it streamed through storied windows."[2] It was a pleasure to walk in the king's forest and see the doe and fawn in the distance, or to watch the squirrels. His love of nature was evidently the only thing which could make him forego pleasure of reading and studying. We have spoken of his love of reading of which he was passionately fond, and which was subservient only to his love of Nature, with pleasure in rural sights and sounds. Both are exhibited when he says:

"And as for me, though I can but lite
On bookes for to rede I me delite,
And to them give I faith and full credence,
And in mine herte have been in reverence
So hertely, that there is game none
That fro my bookes maketh me to gone;
But it be seldom on the holy day,
Save certainly when that the month of May
Is come, and that I hear the foules sing,
And that the flowers guinen for to spring,
Farewell my books and my devotion."[3]

Chaucer's was a well-balanced nature; his acquirements and accomplishments were many. He could negotiate at Genoa for trade extension, look out for violators of revenue laws in the busy city of London, use his practical knowledge to enable him to superintend the king's works when it involved repairing the palace at

[1] Kittredge, G.L.: Chaucer and His Poetry P. 6
[2] Kittredge, G.L.: Chaucer and His Poetry P. 179
[3] Deshler, C.D.: Selections from the Poetical Works of Geoffrey Chaucer

Westminster or simply building a scaffolding from which the royal party could view the jousts; or he could negotiate with foreign power for peace, or urge the sovereign's claim to the hand of a French princess; he was one who would have been equally at home in an interview with one as great as Petrarch or in studying an inn-keeper from whom he could draw the jolly host of the Tabard. Much is expressed here: "All the while, as spectator Chaucer had the remarkable opportunity to observe the whole of what constituted the world of his time, giving the subjects of his attention no impression that they were specimens under the glass of an analyst, but nevertheless going about with an active step and an inquiring eye, whether on diplomatic missions or in the bustle of London. The pageant of life that moved about him was necessarily as indusive as his own pilgrimage; knights and squires, monks and nuns, pardoners and clerks, franklins and merchants, craftsmen and ecclesiasts, men and women of all types, he could know them all, and he was undoubtedly a good 'mixer'. His 'companye' was the company of all mankind."[1.]

Newness in Chaucer's Works--Reflections of the Spirit of His Day--Characteristics Showing His Tolerance Towards the New

"The fourteenth century is the most important epoch in the intellectual history of Europe. It is the point of contact between two widely different eras in the social, religious, and political annals of England; the slack water between the ebb of Feudalism and Chivalry, and the young blood of the Revival of Letters and the great Protestant Reformation. Of this great transformation from the old order to the new, the personal career, no less than the works, of the first great English poet, Chaucer, will furnish us with the most exact type and expression: for, like all men of the highest order of genius, he at once

1. Neilson and Patch: Selections from Chaucer P.XXII

followed and directed the intellectual tenderness of his age, and is himself the abstract and brief chronicle of the spirit of his time." [1] When we say that Chaucer is a representative of the spirit of his time, remember the spirit of newness abroad in this age. He, a child of this age, imbibed it and through his works, expressed it. Chaucer's character is perhaps best studied in his works. The only way to know him truly as a poet is through sympathetic reading of his poetry. It is through such a reading with critics' sympathetic study and insight that we really come to know him. "A marked feature of Chaucer's character was his abhorrence of superstition and imposture." [2] It is because of this feeling and through this that we see skepticism expressed toward superstition and imposture time and again.

Chaucer's acute mind singled out abuses which fettered the growth of the national heart and mind. "He pioneered the way for Refinement and Truth.....His perceptions of the Truth led, by an infallible process, to an enthusiastic adoption and defence of it and to fearless encounters with Falsehood, in whatever shape it oppressed the land." [3] Chaucer marked the dawn of religious and social revolution in Wycliffe's doctrines and the Lollards! and the hatred of the rich and noble, and the scorn of priests, monks, and friars. When we admit that Chaucer marked a revolution against such things as these, we mean that through his poems with their true-to-life pictures he made it possible for people to see in all their squalor the depraved conditions at their worst; and even though merely painting pictures of true life without a con-

1. Mensch: Characters of English Literature P. 1
2. Deshler C.D.: Poetical Works of Geoffrey Chaucer P. 16
3. Deshler C.D.: Poetical Works of Geoffrey Chaucer P. 15

scious attempt to reform, the readers were given opportunity to be moved to disgust, and to action towards reform by the revelation. It was not that Chaucer was a revolutionist or a reformer; let me emphasize that he was not interested in these. But the skillful and dramatic presentation Chaucer placed before his readers could well have served to open men's eyes to the evil and false rampant, and to arouse them to a determination to encourage a newer way of truth and justice and better living. Chaucer's frank portrayal of the evil with no secrets hidden emphasized not only the corruption and grasping greediness and lust of men, but the injustice and unfairness of conditions and the short-comings of those who were supposed to be standing for the highest in life, who were really an authority only for the selfish low gain they could get for themselves. Pictures of those living such lives as these opened possible means of emphasis of skepticism of the conditions, and encouragement of newer better conditions. Thus, an influence towards a change and a break, towards a new day. But before this, a strong feeling against the existing situations, and authority. Chaucer represents his day, its characters and conditions, through the words and actions, the dress, and even the thoughts of the people whose lives he portrays. In his work more than that of any other writer the crowded fourteenth century survives for us, and its men and women breathe and act before us alive even today beyond power of centuries' time and change. And Chaucer is able vividly to picture for us the changing spirit of his age, thus.

Chaucer's writings on superstition (religious) grew out of his love for the Church and an ardent desire to be orthodox, and from sympathy with his countrymen. Chaucer's satires whether on the superstitions of the Church or Age or upon the abuses of Custom

or Fashion, were not the fierce, blind onslaughts of some writers; they did not sparkle with malignity as did Wycliffe's; yet they were as effective, and perhaps more. Chaucer's most severe emphasis upon any seemed to be upon the clergy, who, although hostile to each other, agreed in trying to rivet degraded and even unholy superstitions upon the popular mind. Perhaps the reason Chaucer put so much stress upon this topic was because it was so important in the life of the century. He knew of the great depravity among the clergy which the history of this period surely shows. When even the superiors of the ecclesiastics were unable to restrain, the intelligent laity applied a remedy before the lower orders and youth and females more generally in the land should be wholly corrupted. Chaucer was one of those who saw the evil and in his writing expressed it. Knowing the power of ridicule, and aware of its adaptations to national affairs and understandings of all classes, and directing it through good sense, he defied power and acts of clergy, stripping them of reverence which superstition had wrapped them in; he held them aloft in their naked deformity we may say, and bade all ranks not only to behold but to detest their rottenness. This was the first blow the people administered in a sense, to priestly arrogance and imposture. It was a keen arrow. And Chaucer reflected the spirit, tastes, and feelings, the whole thought of his age. He was no stranger to the religious difficulties of his century.

Indeed, the corruption was bad. Misdeeds and arrogance of the clergy had arrayed both people and monarchy against claims. As a privileged class who used immunities to do evil and corrupt the realm, the clergy became odious to the nobles whose power they shared and often impaired, and to people who could now read their faults and despise their actions, and who were unwilling to pay

hard-earned wages to support idleness and vice. We see reflected clearly in Chaucer's work the low respect towards Church people. Their practices were condemned. There was much with the growth of ignorance and neglect to be reformed; everything betokened the coming of a new era in State, Church, and literature. Chaucer himself encouraged it. In his poems branches of the Orders were represented by the monk and prioress as types of bodies which needed reform. Smaller branches were widely known for their foppery, the young monks painting their cheeks and washing and covering their beards at night, having luxurious sheltered cloisters that sanctioned lewdness and debauchery rather than holiness.

There was some difference between the regular clergy who belonged to orders or monasteries, and the secular clergy or parish priests some of whom were far better. There was jealousy between them; some of the former through their swindling got much more money than they should have, which the latter should really have had. This strong feeling of enmity and the actions of both Chaucer pictures for us vividly as it truly was with all its mire. He does not exaggerate the situations but pictures them clearly and vividly as they really were. There was lamentable ignorance of scripture, and poor methods; there was darkness over the people. They began to long for the English version of the Holy Book with words of eternal life. While people were becoming more clamorous for instruction, and while Wycliffe was meditating the great boon of the translated Bible, which "like a noonday sun, should irradiate the dark places and disclose the loathesome groups and filthy manifestations of cell and cloister, Chaucer was administering the wholesome medicine of satire and contempt." [1]

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[1] Coppee, H.: English Literature Considered as an Interpreter of English History P. 73

Chaucer's treatment of ecclesiastics accords with the fashion of the day as seen in the attitude of the people represented especially through Langland and Wycliffe. Chaucer makes his characters express their feelings as it was really beginning to be felt in his day, especially towards evil living and corruption, and over-extravagance.

In the religious realm the attitude was especially strong against their evil living. Even the Wife of Bath spoke with exquisite irony of: "The grete charite and preyeres
Of lymytours and other holy freres," 1.
the incubuses in the land, and the "holy" men who were often made the butts and japes in tales of coarse sentiment. This was a very clever way for Chaucer to show the regard with which they were looked upon, and to show of what kind of thoughts and deeds they were capable. Chaucer's poems thus very cleverly reflect the feeling of the age not through his writing a tract or sermon, but by transporting us to the life of his day, and letting us look at and listen to the people of various walks from whom we hear the criticism and from whom we catch the skepticism. The characters throw stones at each other as we listen to their skeptical attitude expressed. So we have not a mere criticism or statement of the facts, but a living exemplification taken right from life. In order to portray this in such a clever way, Chaucer's genius was necessary. And as we come later to the development of his talents, and his more complete overthrow of convention in his most original English period we shall see the large result of his new spirit, and an expression of it. We have seen his life and background and we shall see that he

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1. Skeat, W.W.: The Student's Chaucer P. 576, Lines 65-66

chose to write free from the limitations of old requirements, infusing the new and original spirit and making his work uniquely his own. This was a result of the attitude and feeling reflected in his age. Still considering this attitude before we close we shall mention definite characteristics which mark him as one who emphasized a newer trend rather than clinging to that which others followed more blindly. But first we shall point out places which represent newness in Chaucer, to get a broad appreciation of how he did contribute to and represent this feeling.

We usually consider Chaucer as a joyous good-natured and happy personality. It is right to think of him as the poet of the Canterbury Pilgrimage, tripping through flowery meads, or resting in the shade of an arbor always enjoying holiday and singing as his own nightingales. That was Chaucer. Yet, joyous as he was, lightsome, and overflowing with wit and humor and good-fellowship, he also had characteristics of earnestness and seriousness. He could and did rebuke sharply in his own way, and threaten as vigorously as a stern man. True, his satires did not sparkle with the malignity of his contemporary and friend, Wycliffe, nor was his denunciation of errors the result of personal enmity. Chaucer's attitude was from an ardent desire to purify, and from a living sympathy with this countrymen. Nevertheless, his writings on the superstitions of the Church or the Age, or on the abuses of Custom or of Fashion are not less keen but often more potent and effective. A hearty laugh and a poke in the ribs are often what bring results. He could make people wince at the same time they joined in his mirth. Perhaps it was partly the jovial, free, frank characteristics in Chaucer's writing without the decided views of a reformer which made his work so effective and important in the new spirit coming.

Behind it all was Chaucer's hatred of superstition and imposture. In Chaucer's generation there was emphasis of luxury, over-elaborateness in dress, love of wealth; there was much evil living, and corruption in the religious fields; there had been definite class distinctions. With so much of this falseness rampant in the religious realm which was so widely affecting every side of the life of the people--probably the most vital question of the day--it is little wonder that Chaucer was most severe of all in his portrayal of the clergy who fairly "swarmed over the land in countless varieties."[1] Evidence is plentiful of the awful condition. No single instrument probably shows the details and specific changes so systematically as Bishop Wykeham's injunctions (1373) for correcting abuses in the religious houses of the diocese. A knowledge of this background will help us appreciate the more Chaucer's presentations. This bill of Bishop Wykeham's censured the clergy for neglecting to perform various services of the Church; for excessive ignorance of some of them; for continued and open violation of rules of their order; for the love of hounds and hunting-matches; for vanity and foppishness in dress; for other personal filthiness; and for the habit of pawning holy vestments; for obscenity and wantonness in the very choirs and cloisters. All these are important for us to remember if we are to appreciate the apt way in which Chaucer portrayed all this in the actual and natural way it was present, through his own marvelous poems, especially his Canterbury Tales. They reflect the feeling of the period with severity upon the clergy especially, and they are expressive of deliberate opinions.

We shall see clearly in the quotations to be given of what the religious orders were made up, when Chaucer for one, and others,

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[1] Deshler, C. D. Selections from the Poetical Works of Geoffrey Chaucer P. 16

determined to expose their vileness. "To England, they were like the plague of lice, which of old covered all the borders of Egypt .....it might be truly said of these reptiles that they 'came up into the houses, and into the bed-chambers, and upon the beds, and into the houses of the servants, and upon the people.' Or, they were like the lean kine in Pharoah's dream that destroyed those that were 'well favored and fat-fleshed.'"[1.] For the foreign mendicants had first been introduced to correct licentiousness, dissipation, and negligence of the regular monastics, whereupon they finally adopted their vices and then became as bad as their predecessors. The vices were grounded on unbounded ambition, intolerable arrogance, and degraded superstitions as we shall see vividly in Chaucer's writing. Even to the State these orders became a burden, since they felt it their place not only to interrupt but to direct. They were endowed by the Pope, among other immunities, with the privilege of traveling without liability to charge and were absolved from all municipal taxes; they had access to all ranks and were the accredited confessors, the commissioned instructors of youth and women of the land. Even the garb of religion (as well as the thorough-going sincerety of life), was thrown off unblushingly, even respect for appearances being disregarded. Chaucer clearly shows us the pictures of such characters as these. The most palpable frauds and artifices were used to enrich and enlarge various convents, as Chaucer shows from real life. "The most licentious desires, the most damnable crimes were hidden under the flimsy coverings of the.....friars."[2.] These mendicants were creatures of the Pope, and stubbornly maintained his supremacy in opposition to other authorities. Chaucer shows vividly and in detail the

1. Deshler, C. D. : Selections from the Poetical Works of Geoffrey Chaucer P. 68
2. Deshler, C. D.: Selections from the Poetical Works of Geoffrey Chaucer P. 68

corrupt practices of the infamous beings, the prevailing licentiousness, and the ruining wealth and luxury. It is with the keen skepticism portrayed in the field of religion that Chaucer is especially illustrative, and being an important question of the day we shall put emphasis on this field.

Indeed, "If we wish to find the most striking religious history of the age, we must seek it in the portraitures of religious characters and events in his Canterbury Tales."[1] Chaucer helped forward the cause of reformation by attack upon weak branches of ecclesiastical conditions and government. His work informs us of "a wholesome reform in religion. He was not only respected as the father of English poetry, but revered as a champion of the Reformation."[2] To be sure, the religious realm was not the only one in which evil habits and living, sham and disguise were practiced, and over-emphasis of the faults rather than the truth was made, and in which the habits of dress, over-eating,and luxury strengthened vice. But Chaucer seemed to see beneath all the various exhibitions of sham to the root and bottom of it all; he seemed to see that all this love of over-dress, over-eating or drinking to excess, love of evil habits, practices of duping,--all this, and more, was based not on the true and the firm, but on something artificial. So he went to the depth, as well as merely picking out the results to cut off. People were pictured impure at the source and not from the surface; impure in their desires, purposes and aims in life so that their actions were also evil. So Chaucer portrays through his writings the squalor and falsity present because of the lack of truth, and steadfastness, and fortitude, and nobility, which he tells us should be based not

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1. Coppee, H.: English Literature Considered as an Interpreter of English History P. 73
2. Coppee, H.: Introduction to Poets of Queen Elizabeth's Age P. 70

upon the old traditional idea, as we shall see. Of wealth, love of money, position, selfishness, vileness, practices of the day such as falseness in making money, love of luxuries and over-abundance of food, emphasis of dress and fashion-general evil based upon artificialities there is a skeptical note.

It is true that Chaucer showed skepticism not only while he was naming the evil practices and describing evil characters, and talking against them, but also when he holds up the good which should be, as over against the evil which was rife. Thus it is possible to interpret a skeptical attitude not only in his stories of those who were practicing evil (as they did in his day), but in his stories upholding positive ideas and ideals of truth, fortitude, or faithfulness. In these latter it is effective because of the contrast between what should be and what actually was. He portrays the rottenness; also, pictures of the conditions on a basis of more knowledge and truth. He paints the conditions and characters with reality that along with other forces of the century were moving towards a new spirit; these forceful pictures of the awful lives made themselves a possible means of encouragement towards the new spirit and towards a change from evil to good which was generally and individually needed.

To consider the new spirit in Chaucer we must study the characters he expresses, and the words they reveal with their significance. In considering Chaucer and the new spirit of the fourteenth century, we may look upon certain characters he portrayed from the life of his day --types of characters with whose actions and attitudes there was much dissatisfaction stirring. Wycliffe was doing all he could to reform not only the practices but the Church. Chaucer, not the reformer, but the poet was to expose in no moderate way the lives of the corrupt. Here were the actions of these people written down

and described vividly, but very accurately by a great writer. Such a portrayal of the awful conditions must surely make them stand out clearly. Even though Chaucer made no conscious attempt to correct through his writings, his striking portraits showing the evil present could be used to impress people with the need for something better. Even though he did not intend to reform, people reading of the terrible practices might be moved to encourage a better spirit, even a reform. There were forces abroad urging this, anyway, and Chaucer's clear-cut, dramatic, and emphatic illustrations of what people knew was going on right around them may have been no small encouragement to reform, although Chaucer himself did not write his words, as a reformer. Thus, I feel we are justified in considering these characters he pictured so strikingly, under the consideration of the new spirit which was being kindled and was to flame more brightly.

Let us think first of the religious conditions. This is expressed through the monk, who was an out-rider, one who had received commission to make a tour of inspection in regard to remote farms and rented properties of the monastery. He was one of those drones who fed upon the toil and sweat of the people; and at the same time he forged the iron chain of superstition that bowed their necks in servitude. Merrily did Chaucer belabor his shoulders. First, he recounted the tastes and accomplishments of this son of the cross who was such a rider about the country-side, such a lover of hunting. Many horses were in his stable, and when he rode, men could hear his bridle jingle in the wind as loud as the chapel bell.

"A Monk ther was, a fair for the maistrye,
An out-rydere, that lovede venerye;
A manly man, to been an abbot able.
Ful many a deyntee hors hadde he in stable:
And whan he rood, men mighte his brydel here
Ginglen in a whistling wind as clere,
And eek as loude as dooth the chapel-belle
Ther as this lord was keper of the celle." [1]

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1. Skeat, W.W.: The Student's Chaucer P. 421, Lines 165-172
P. 421, Lines 173-176

He remarked upon the scrupulous attention of this holy man to the rules of his order. Since the rule of the order was old and austere, this monk let old things pass and followed the newer world:

"The reule of seint Maure or of seint Beneit,
By-cause that it was old and some-del streit,
This ilke monk leet olde thinges pace,
And held after the newe world the space." 1.

He did not care about the text which said that hunters were not holy, or that a careless monk was like a fish out of water. He would not give an oyster for such a text. Rather, he chose to ride and ride hard followed by greyhounds as swift as flying birds. All his pleasure was based on riding and hunting hares no matter at what cost.

"He yaf nat of that text a pulled hen,
That seith, that hunters been nat holy men;
Ne that a monk, whan he is cloisterlees,
Is lykned til a fish that is waterlees;
This is to seyn, a monk out of his cloistre.
But thilke text held he nat worth an oistre: " 2.

Instead of being clothed in coarse hair-cloth and showing signs of mortification of a sinful body the poet says:

"Therefore he was a pricasour aright;
Grehoundes he hadde, as swifte as fowel in flight;
Of priking and of hunting for the hare
Was al his lust, for no cost wolde he spare.
I seigh his sleves purfiled at the hond
With grys, and that the fyneste of the lond;
And, for to festne his hood under his chin,
He hadde a gold-y-wroght a curious pin:
A love-knotte in the gretter ende ther was.
His heed was balled, that shoon as any glas,
And eek his face, as he had been anoint.
He was a lord ful fat and in good point;
His eyen stepe, and rollinge in his heed,
That stemed as a forneys of a leed;
His bottes souple, his hors in greetestat.
Now certeinly he was a fair prelat;
He was nat pale as a for-pyned goost.
A fat swan loved he best of any roost.
His palfrey was as broun as is a berye." 3.

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1. Skeat, W.W. : The Student's Chaucer P. 421, Lines 165-172;
   P. 421, Lines 173-176
2,3, Skeat, W.W.: The Students's Chaucer P.421, Lines 177-182
   P. 421, Lines 189-207

Here was the monk with sleeves edged at the wrist with fine fur, the finest to be had in the country, his hood fastened under his chin with a finely wrought gold brooch in the larger end of which was placed a love-knot. His head shone as glass, and his face as if he had taken pains to anoint it. No thin body his, denied of nourishment. He was sleek and fat. His eyes were bright and glowed like the fire under a cauldron. His boots were made of rich soft leather; his horse was in good array. The prelate was not at all pale or emaciated--not he. Why should he be ? He loved best of all to eat, a fat roast swan.

Among the most disgusting characters in Chaucer's picture reflecting his times was this ungodly greasy monk. In the Prioresses Tale she says:

> "This abbot, which that was an holy man
> As monkes been, or elles oghten be," 1.

showing skepticism towards the kind of life they were really living in contrast to the kind they ought to have been living. Again she says, "This holy monk, this abbot, him mene I." 2.

Chaucer displays the monk as he is given up to every luxury, dressed in his costly black dress with fine fur edgings, and the love-knot fastening his hood; expressing his preference for hunting over that of pouring into a stupid book inside a cloister.

In the remarks of the host there is a tone of skepticism when he looks at the monk and asks him to tell a tale, at the same time remarking upon his fair skin, saying it must be a good pasture where he fed; that he seems not a penitent or a ghost, but rather some officer, sacristan or such declaring he looks not like a poor cloister monk or novice but like a governor wise and wily.

1,2, Skeat W.W.: The Student's Chaucer P. 501, Lines 1832-1833
P. 501, Lines 1860; P. 530, Lines 3122-3132

"I vow to god, thou hast a ful fair skin,
It is a gentil pasture ther thou goost;
Thou art nat lyk a penaunt or a goost.
Upon my feith thou art som officer,
Some worthy sexteyn, or som celerer,
For by my fader soule, as to my doom,
Thou art a maister whan thou art at hoom;
No povre cloisterer, ne no novys,
But a governour, wyly and wys.
And therwithal of brawnes and of bones
A wel-faring persone for the nones." 1.

In the Monk's Prologue, he says he will tell tragedies or stories of those who stood once in great prosperity but fell out of their high estate to misery and ended in wretchedness. No remedy could bring them out of their adversity whether popes, kings or emperors. In Chaucer's day many were emphasizing high estate and prosperity and luxury to the exclusion of all other considerations. The monk tells:

"Of him that stood in greet prosperitee
And is y-fallen out of heigh degree
Into miserie, and endeth wrecchedly." 2.

Was the monk to display skepticism toward those in Chaucer's very age emphasizing high estate and luxury, and towards what would happen to those who thought they would always be safe in such high places and with such securities of material nature ?

Against the Friar especially did Chaucer pour his biting acid, and in this he appears as the second avenger of Wycliffe who had mercilessly exposed the foul sore of the Roman Church. The Friar hiding lasciviousness under the appearance of "a ful solemone man," 3 ravaged the country as a confessor to stupid men and women, fleecing the pockets of some and debasing the honor of others. Herein through the accurate and life-like portrayal of this character does Chaucer definitely create the very atmosphere of skepticism towards the wicked and vile practices of his day.

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1. Skeat W.W.: The Student's Chaucer P. 501, Lines 1832-1833
P. 501, Lines 1860; P. 530, Lines 3122-3132
2,3. Skeat W.W.: The Student's Chaucer P. 531, Lines 3165-3167;
P. 421, Line 209

The Friar was without even the semblance of virtue which was the tribute of the hypocrite to holy faith. Chaucer's Friar was a merry scoundrel taking every license, kissing the wives and talking love to the girls in his wanderings as he begs for his Church and his Order. His hood was stuffed with trinkets to give them; he was known as the best beggar of his house; his eyes were alight with wine; he struck his little harp, strummed out funny songs and love-ditties. His frolic over, he preached to the collected crowd violent denunciations of the parish priest within the very limits of his parish. The principles upon which these mendicant orders were established seemed to be elements of evil. That they might be better than monks, they had no cloisters and magnificent gardens with little to do but enjoy them. Instead of sanctifying, the itinerary was their great temptation and final ruin. Nothing could be conceived better calculated to harden the heart and to destroy the fierce sensibilities of nature than to be a beggar and a wanderer

Here was a begging friar, a self-important person with such gay and flattering talk as none other in the four orders had. A fine person to represent holiness and divinity! He had married more than one young woman " at his owne cost."[1] He was a pillar of his order, and was beloved and familiar among the franklins through the country and with "worthy" town women; for he himself said he had more virtue as a confessor than as a parson; he held a papal license.

[1] Skeat W.W.:The Student's Chaucer P. 421, Line 213: P. 421 Lines 208-220

"A Frere ther was, a wantawn and a merye,
A limitour, a ful solempne man.
In alle the ordres foure is noon that can
So muche of daliaunce and fair language.
He hadde maade ful many a mariage
Of yonge wommen, at his owne cost.
Un-to his ordre he was a noble post.
Ful wel biloved and famulier was he
With frankeleyns over-al his contree,
And eek with worthy wommen of the toun;
For he had power of confessioun,
As seyde him-self, more than a curat,
For of his ordre he was licentiat." 1.

Sweetly did he hear confession and his absolution was pleasant (for a purpose); he gave penance freely when he saw a good pittance coming to him in return as, for instance, a worth-while dinner. Gifts, to him, were a good sign of absolution and the man who gave much seemed to him most contrite. Such were his thoughts, centered only upon gain for himself. He believed some persons to be of such a make-up they could not weep though they suffered. Little did he care whether they wept or not or even about their real feeling or suffering, or for aiding them in their trouble. Instead of weeping and praying he would rather have them show silver for penance.

"Ful swetely herde he confessioun,
And pleasaunt was his absolucioun;
He was an esy man to yeve penaunce
Ther as he wiste to han a good pitaunce;
For unto a povre ordre for to yive
Is signe that a man is wel y-shrive.
For if he yaf, he dorste make avaunt,
He wiste that a man was repentaunt.
For many a man so hard is of his herte,
He may nat wepe al-thogh him sore smerte.
Therfore, in stede of weping and preyeres
Men moot yeve silver to the povre frerer." 2.

This Friar's tippet was filled with little knick-knacks such as knives and pins for presents to give comely women.

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1. Skeat, W.W.: The Student's Chaucer, P. 421, Lines 208-220
2. Skeat, W.W.: The Student's Chaucer P. 422, Lines 221-232

"His tipet was ay farsed ful of knyves
And pinnes, for to yeven faire wyves.
And certeinly he hadde a mery note; " [1]

In fact he had a pleasant voice for singing, and could also play the fiddle; in singing ballads he took the prize.

"Wel coude he singe and pleyen on a rote.
Of yeddinges he bar utterly the prys.
His nekke whyt was as the flour-de-lys;
Ther-to he strong was as a champioun." [2]

He knew the town taverns, inn-keepers, and bar-maids better than the lepers and beggar-women, for it did not accord with his importance (or rather, it was not to his advantage), to have acquaintance with sick lepers; it did not profit enough to deal with such poor people. Better for him to mingle with the rich people; but whereever there was a chance for gain, there was he most courteous, most lowly, and most serviceable.

"He knew the tavernes wel in every toun,
And everich hostiler and tappestere
Bet than a lazar or a beggestere;
For un-to swich a worthy man as he
Accorded nat, as by his facultee,
To have with seke lazars aqueyntaunce.
It is nat honest, it may nat avaunce
For to delen with no swich poraille,
But al with riche and sellers of vitaille.
And over-al, ther as profit sholde aryse,
Curteys he was, and lowly of servyse." [3]

As a beggar he was the best in his convent and gave a certain annual payment that none of his brethren would trespass on his routes. If a widow had not even an old shoe to give at first, so pleasant did he make his "In principio," [4] he would not leave without a farthing.

"He was the beste beggere in his hous;
And yaf a certeyn ferme for the graunt;
Noon of his bretheren cam ther in his haunt;
For thogh a widwe hadde noght a sho,
So pleasaunt was his 'In Principio',
Yet wolde he have a ferthing, er he wente." [5]

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1. Skeat, W.W. : The Student's Chaucer P. 422, Lines 233-235
2. Skeat. W.W. : The Student's Chaucer P. 422, Lines 236-239
3. Skeat, W.W. : The Student's Chaucer P. 422, Lines 240-250
4. Skeat, W.W. : The Student's Chaucer P. 422, Line 253,
5. Skeat, W.W. : The Student's " " " 252-255

He gained more from begging than from his property. He romped about like a puppy. In love-days he was not like a cloister-monk or poor scholar with threadbare cape but more like a cardinal. His half-cape was of double worsted. He lisped a bit to make his English sound sweet upon his tongue, and when he harped and sang his eyes twinkled in his head "As doon the sterres in the frosty night." [1.]

> "His purchas was wel bettre than his rente.
> And rage he coude, as it were right a whelpe.
> In love-days ther coude he muchel helpe.
> For there he was nat lyk a cloisterer,
> With thredbar cope, as is a povre scoler,
> But he was lyk a maister or a pope." [2.]

The Summoner, maddened against the false Friar, expressed his feeling against the evil through the story of his prologue during which he said:

> "Sin ye han herd this false Frere lye,"
> ....
> This Frere bosteth that he knoweth helle,
> And god it woot, that it is litel wonder;
> Freres and feendes been but lyte a-sonder." [3.]

It is little wonder, according to the Summoner, that the Friar boasted of knowing about hell, since friars and fiends were not far apart. In the story following he slurs the friars:

> "For pardee, ye han ofte tyme herd telle,
> How that a frere ravished was to helle
> In spirit ones by a visioun;
> And as an angel ladde him up and doun,
> To shewen him the peynes that ther were,
> In al the place saugh he nat a frere;
> Of other folk he saugh y-nowe in wo,
> Un-to this angel spak the frere tho;
> 'Now, sir,' quod he, 'han freres swich a grace
> That noon of hem shal come to this place ?'
> 'Yis' quod this angel, 'many a millioun!" [4.]

1,2, Skeat W.W.: The Student's Chaucer P. 422, Lines 268;
P. 422, Lines 256-260
3. Skeat, W.W.:The Student's Chaucer P. 587, Lines 1670-1674
4. Skeat, W.W.:The Student's Chaucer P. 587, Lines 1675-1685

He impled the atmosphere and dwelling place of friars to be in hell and evil. He ended his prologue thus:

" God save yow alle, save this cursed Frere: "[1]

In the Summoner's tale skepticism of the evil practices of the friars with their corruptions is clearly seen. The Summoner told of a Friar who had preached at a Church stirring the people above all to pay for trentals for God's sake, to give for holy houses where divine service was honored, not where the holy goods of the Church was wasted and consumed, nor where alms were needed as among the endowed clergy who might live in abundance. He reminded them that trentals delivered friends' souls from pain, whether young or old. A priest could sing merrily more than one mass a day. So he plead to deliver souls of their friends; to save them from being clawed with hooks or raked and burned. For Christ's love, he plead with them to speed the work.

When the Friar had done talking and receiving what the people gave, he was off with scrip and staff. Into every house he pried, begging a meal or at least a piece of cheese, or else some wheat. His fellow with him had a staff tipped with horn, and some tablets, and wrote the names of all who gave anything, as if prayers were to be made for them especially to repay their goodness. What honor to have one's name written on this ivory tablet of neatly polished style.

[1] Skeat, W.W.: The Student's Chaucer P. 588, Line 1707

> "With scrippe and tipped staf, y-tukled hye;
> In every hous he gan to poure and prye,
> And beggeth mele, and chese, or elles corn.
> His felawe hadde a staf tipped with horn,
> A peyre of tables al of yvory,
> And a poyntel polisshed fetisly,
> And wroot the names alwey, as he stood,
> Of alle folk that yaf him any good,
> Ascaunces that he wolde for hem preye."[1]

The plea was ever:

> " 'Yeve us a busshel whete, malt, or reye,
> A goddes kechil, or a trip of chese,
> Or elles what yow list, we may nat chese:
> A goddes halfpeny or a masse-peny,
> Or yeve us of your brawn, if ye have eny;
> A dagon of your blanket, leve dame,
> Our suster dere, lo! here I write your name;
> Bacon or beef, or swich thing as ye finde.' "[2]

A sturdy servant went behind bearing on his back a bag in which to carry the booty. But

> "....whan that he was out at dore anon,
> He planed awey the names everichon
> That he biforn had writen in his tables;
> He served hem with nyfles and with fables."[3]

Finally the friar came to the house where he was accustomed to be refreshed especially where the man of the house lay bedridden. Softly and courteously did he speak to the man, flatteringly saying,

> " 'here have I eten many a mery meel;' "[4]

He went on to stress how many precious orisons he had said for the man's salvation. His sermon at Church that day was "Nat al after the text of holy writ ;"[5] He explained more about it:

1,2,3,4,5, Skeat, W.W.: The Student's Chaucer P. 588, Lines 1738-1745; P. 588, Lines 1746-1753; P. 588, Lines 1757-1760; P. 589, Line 1774, P. 589, Line 1790.

"For it is hard to yow, as I suppose,
And therfore wol I teche yow al the glose.
Glosinge is a glorious thing, certeyn,
For lettre sleeth, so as we clerkes seyn.
Ther have I taught hem to be charitable,
And spende hir good ther it is reasonable." [1]

He spoke of the dame of the house and with much flattery to her got her good will, who invited his suggestions for eating which he gave freely, stressing however the fact that his spirit drew its nourishment only from the Bible.

"Seyde this wyf, 'how fare ye hertely?'
The frere aryseth up ful curteisly,
And hir embraceth in his armes narwe,
And kiste hir swete, and chirketh as a sparwe
With his lippes: 'dame', quod he, 'right weel,
As he that is your servant every deel,
Thanked be god, that yow yaf soule and lyf,
In al the chirche, god so save me! '
'Ye, god amende defautes, sir, ' quod she,
'Algates wel-come be ye, by my fey! ' [2]

When told of the death of the child within two weeks, the Friar quickly told of the revelation to him, and of the actions of himself and his convent:

"And up I rose, and al our convent eke,
With many a tere trikling on my cheke,
Withouten noyse or clateringe of belles;
Te deum was our song and no-thing elles,
Save that to Crist I seyde an orisoun,
Thankinge him of his revelacioun." [3]

Then he went on to impress his hearers with his Order.

"Who-so wol preye, he moot faste and be clene,
And fatte his soule and make his body lene.
We fare as seith th'apostle; cloth and fode
Suffysen us, though they be nat ful gode.
The clennesse and the fastinge of us freres
Maketh that Crist accepteth our preyers." [4]

Still eager to impress his hearers with the sincerity and devotion of his convent he went on to tell of the fasting and prayers, the poverty, and abstinence of his Order:

1,2,3,4, Skeat, W.W.: The Student's Chaucer P. 589, Lines 1791-1796; P. 168, Lines 1801-1811; P. 590, Lines 1863-1868; P. 590 Lines 1879-1884

"Our lord Jesu, as holy writ devyseth,
Yaf us ensample of fastinge and preyers.
Therfor we mendinants, we sely freres,
Ben wedded to poverte and continence,
To charitee, humblesse, and abtinence,
To persecucion for rightwisnesse
To wepinge, misericorde, and clennesse.
And therfor may ye see that our preyers--
I speke of us, we mendinants, we freres--
Ben to the hye god more acceptable
Than youres, with your festes at the table.
Fro Paradys first, if I shal not lye,
Was man out chaced for his glotonye;
And chaast was man in Paradys, certeyn." 1.

In addition he told more, to prepare to lead up to the plea for money:

"But I shall finde it in a maner glose,
That specially our swete lord Jesus
Spak this by freres, whan he seyde thus:
'Blessed be they that povre in spirit been.'
And so forth al the gospel may ye seen,
Wher it be lyker our professioun,
Or hirs that swimmen in possessioun.
Fy on hir pompe and on hir glotonye!
And for hir lewdnesse I hem diffye." 2.

And further:

"But we that humble been and chast and pore,
Werkers of Goddes word, not auditours ?" 3.

But he wanted to bring things closer to Thomas, the bedridden man of the house, personally. So he points out how much he and his brothers are going to do for him, (trying to make the man ready to hand out some money):

"In our chapitre praye we day and night
To Crist, that he thee sende hele and might,
Thy body for to welden hastily.' " 4.

Thomas, the sick man, replied unappreciatively and skeptically:

"'God woot, 'quod he, 'no-thing ther-of fele I;
As help me Crist, as I in fewe yeres,
Han spended, up-on dyvers maner freres,
Ful many a pound; yet fare I never the bet.
Certeyn, my good have I almost biset.
Farwel, my gold! for it is al ago.'" 5.

But the Friar cannot allow the sick man to keep this attitude.

1,2,3,4,5, Skeat, W.W.: The Student's Chaucer P. 590, Line 1904-1917; P. 591, Lines 1920-1928; P. 591, Lines 1936-1937; P. 591, Lines 1945-1947; P. 591, Lines 1948-1953

He must create a better, more advantageous feeling towards his brethren and himself if he is to procure benefit. So he quickly made use of the words of the man to try to gain more for his convent alone, saying this man had been dividing his money among too many. He plead for the money not for himself, of course!

> "Thomas! nought of your tresor I desyre
> As for my-self, but that al our covent
> To preye for yow is ay so diligent,
> And for to builden Cristes owene chirche." 1.

Still pleading that he make confession, the Friar was told by the man that he had already been shriven by his parson that day, anyway. He had told his parson of his state and

> "Nedeth na-more to speke of it 'seith he,
> 'But if me list of myn humilitee.'" 2.

When the Friar's eloquence was threatened with failure, he tried to put forth even more strength in his plea for gold to build the holy house, telling of the sacrifices the brethren had made while other people had fared smoothly.

> "'Yif me thanne of thy gold, to make our cloister,'
> Quod he, 'for many a muscle and many an oistre,
> Whan other man han ben ful wel at eyse," 3.

Yet the foundation of the house was hardly finished and debts were owing. For His sake, help. If aid failed for such a project, even their books must be sold, whereupon if their preaching were lacking, the world would go to destruction. Rob the world of such holy leaders? He who would do that would rob the world of the very sun. Think of the holy lives and deeds of these men whose lives were for the good of all, unselfish, pure and devout!

> "Now help, Thomas, for him that harwed helle!
> For elles moste we our bokes selle.
> And if ye lakke our predicacioun,
> Than gooth the world al to destruccioun,
> For who-so wolde us fro this world bireve,

1,2,3, Skeat, W.W.: The student's Chauser P.591, Lines 1974
1977; P. 593, Lines 2097-2098; P. 593, Lines 2099-2101

> So god me save, Thomas, by your leve,
> He wolde bireve out of this world the sonne." 1.

Think of the building of the holy house, unfinished yet. Think of the books. So for charity's sake he begged on his knee;

> "Now Thomas, help, for seinte Chariteel
> And doun anon he sette him on his knee." 2.

But the sick man's skepticism waxed more strong with all the false dissimulation:

> "This syke man wax well ny wood for ire:
> He wolde that the frere had been on-fire
> With his false dissimulacioun." 3.

Not only in the details, the words, the incidents, the characters and attitudes does Chaucer represent the spirit of this person but in the whole story itself and the position in which it places the Friar and the life of the friars of the day.

The Summoner is a momento of an execrable class extinguished long since. He was an officer of one of the ecclesiastical courts with duties and rank analogous to those of a constable. The incumbent of an office that was far from respectable or popular, he was also very ignorant and his drunken attempts to display his learning were extremely ludicrous. The gross and disgusting nature of his tastes and vices is apparent by the foul diseases which have mastery over him. By the fine touch of art, the poet gives us possession of the same personal repugance of an abandoned and mercenary class as actuated himself and his countrymen. The Summoner of Edward the Third's reign was as little beloved as a collector of tithes or excise might have been.

In a category of contempt Chaucer placed the Summoner to the Church courts. Of his fire-red face, his beard, the knobs on his cheeks, "children were aferd."4.

1,2,3,4, Skeat,W.W.: The Student's Chaucer P. 593, Lines 2107-2113 P. 593, Lines 2119-2120; P. 593, Lines 2121-2123; P. 427 Lines 628

The Friar in his tale represents the Summoner as in league with the devil who carries him away. He was a drinker of strong wines, a conniver at evil for bribes; for a good sum he would "techen him to have non awe, in swich cas, of the erchedeknes curs;"[1] to him, the Church system meant nothing unless he could reap a harvest.

This Summoner bore upon his diseased body marks of vicious living. If he did appear to stand in no awe of the archdeacon's curse, of his spiritual degeneracy, he might well have consulted the Doctor of Physic or some other physician about his aggravated physical disease. His symptoms indicated that he was a dangerously sick man:

> "A Somnour was ther with us in that place,
> That hadde a fyr-reed cherubinnes face,
> For sawcefleem he was, with eyen narwe,
> As hoot he was, and lecherous, as a sparwe;
> With scalled browes blake, and piled berd;
> Of his visage children were aferd.
> Ther nas quik-silver, litarge, ne brimstoon,
> Boras, ceruce, ne oille of tartre noon,
> Ne oynement that wolde clense and byte,
> That him mighte helpen of his whelkes whyte,
> Nor of the knobbes sittinge on his chekes.
> Wel loved he garleek, oynons, and eek lekes,
> And for to drinken strong wyn, reed as blood."[2]

From the description of this person we can see that he had developed a terrible disease. In his evil and ritous living and treacherous life his character is portrayed as well as his awful disease. The small pimples he had developed into great infected ones; his eyebrows gave the impression of a scabby surface of black color. His beard, too, was thin and slight. His eyes were swollen and inflamed a violent red, and the lids already deprived of their lashes, were enlarged so he could see only through narrow slits between. His eyes, as Chaucer says, were "narwe."[3]

1, 2, 3, Skeat, W.W.: The Student's Chaucer P. 427 Lines 654-655 P. 427, Lines 623-635; P. 427, Line 625

No wonder children were afraid of this person and his face. Even his voice with the "stif burdoun"[1.] which he bore to the Pardoner's love-song and his crying out as if he were mad after a drink of blook-red wine,--his voice with its rough and husky quality of a leper was frightening.

Chaucer indicated causes of the disease of the Summoner, "Lecherous as a sparwe",[2.] He was accoustomed to over-eating of that which was not supposed to be helpful to his normal condition. These two points of attack represent skepticism in general in this age and are only emphasized more clearly, especially against his class, as Chaucer endowed the Summoner with these characteristics of a lecherous life and an intemperate one, the characteristics of which were much overdone in this century. Having once contracted his disease through riotous living and by the immoderate use of unwholesome meats and wines, he further aggravated it by the same foolhardy practices.

To understand the nature and causes of the disease we need to have intimate acquaintance with the personalities and secret lives of men like the Summoner,--knaves of the fourteenth century who, human beings living, Chaucer has breathe, enjoy life, suffer pain, and carry on their nefarious practices with the reactions of the ordinary mortals they were in their century. "They are faithful transcripts[3] from life." They are themselves in their own right. The material Chaucer used in the creation of their characters was drawn fron an inexhaustible wealth of observation of men with their ways, of their emotions and contradictory desires, even their hidden motives, impulses and cross-purposes. Every separate element of the character of each individual was inextricably bound

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1,2, , Skeat, W.W.: The student's Chaucer P 427, Line 673;
P. 427, Line 626

3. Curry, W.C.: Chaucer and the Mediaeval Sciences P. 50

up with and affected by the ravages of physical disease. As it was in real life, the symptoms of the maladies appearing on the face and body became the infallible indices of the inward character.

The Summoner of boorish action and speech was to some extent the Summoner who had brought on himself a terrible disease. His natural cunning and grasping mind was dulled at times and his moral sense apparently atrophied by the ravages of disease and unabated malpractices which originally brought it on. He continued to devour an abundance of innutritious vegetables and to pour quantities of red wine down his throat, crowning himself in drunken foolery with a garland and in mockery arming himself with a buckler made of cake.

As the fiery intoxicant ran through his veins he repeated like a parrot the few Latin terms which his numbed intelligence had been able to catch from the jargon of ecclesiastical courts. But if tested more widely, his learning was lacking.

" A fewe termes hadde he, two or three,
That he had lerned out of som decree;
No wonder is, he herde it al the day;
And eek ye knowen wel, how that a jay
Can clepen 'Watte,' as well as can the pope.
But who-so coude in other thing him grope,
Thanne hadde he spent al his philosophye;" 1.

In exchange for quarts of wine his custom had long been to wink at the immorality of those people able to buy immunity from the exercise of authority.

" He wolde suffre, for a quart of wyn,
A good felawe to have his concubyn
A twelf-month, and excuse him atte fulle:
Ful prively a finch eek coude he pulle." 2.

The Friar gave an indignant generalization about summoners which was no doubt too applicable in this case.

" Pardee, ye may wel knowe by the name,
That of a somnour may no good be sayed;

1,2, Skeat, W.W.: The Student's Chaucer P.427, Lines 639-645; P. 427 Lines 649-652

I praye that noon of you be yvel apayed.
A somnour is a renner up and doun
With mandements for fornicacioun,
And is y-bet at every tounes ende.' "1.

The Friar through his tale expresses keen skepticism towards the Summoner. In his story he tells of an archdeacon of high estate who boldly punished fornication, witchcraft, pandering, slander, and adultery; also, church-wardens' offenses, breaches of wills and contracts, neglect of sacraments and other offenses as well as usury and simony. But greatest woe he brought to lechers. Those who had not paid tithes were treated roughly if a parson made complaint about them. This official never missed a chance to punish by fines. He made the people sing piteously for small offering and scant tithes; for they would be named in the arch-deacon's book before the bishop caught them up. The jurisdiction gave power to penalize. This arch-deacon had at hand a summoner to help him--no slyer boy in England was there.

" He hadde a Somnour redy to his hond,
A slyer boy was noon in Englelond;" 2.

He had a whole crew to assist and spy about to give him clues to hunt down. He could well afford, he felt, to let go a few lechers whose knowledge could find him twenty-four more.

" He coude spare of lechours oon or two,
To techen him to foure and twenty mo." 3.

The Friar in his Tale says he is determined to tell of the rascality of the Summoner even though it make anger intense, for he himself was beyond his power over whom the Summoner had no jurisdiction nor ever could have:

" To telle his harlotrye I wol nat spare;
For we been out of his correccioun;" 4.

At these words the Summoner on the Canterbury Pilgrimage angrily spit out some words in reply but the Friar went on with his story.

1,2,3,4, Skeat, W.W.: The Student's Chaucer P. 581, Lines 1280-1285 P. 582, Lines 1321-1322; P. 582, Lines 1325-1326; P. 582, Lines 1328-1329

He told of the Summoner of his Tale, the false thief who always had bands ready as a hawk to lure, who told many secrets learned. They were, in fact, his private agents and he made much profit through them; he knew not how much.

> " They weren hise approwours prively;
> He took him-self a great profit therby;"1.

He could summon ignorant men on pain of excommunication, and they, caught in a trap, were glad to give him money and feasts at the alehouse. We are even told:

> " And was a theef, right swich a theef was he;
> His maister hadde but half his duetee.
> He was, if I shal yeven him his laude,
> A theef, and eek a Somnour, and a baude." 2.

So did this Summoner play the thief handing over half what was due his higher master. He had wenches at his service besides his other private agents. The wenches were in partnership with him and would tell him who had been with them.

> " He hadde eek wenches at his retenue,
> That, whether that sir Robert or sir Huwe,
> Or Jakke, or Rauf, or who-so that it were,
> That lay by hem, they tolde it in his ere;"3.

Then the Summoner would call forth both before the Chapter fleecing the man and letting the wench go, promising to strike her name from the black books, as friend. (This was in preparation for more aid later).

> " This was the wenche and he of oon assent.
> And he wolde fecche a feyned mandement,
> And somne hem to the chapitre bothe two,
> And pile the man, and lete the wenche go,
> Thanne wolde he seye, 'frend, I shal for they sake
> Do stryken hir out of our lettres blake;
> Thee thar no-more as in this cas travaille;
> I am thy freend, ther I thee may availe,'" 4.

Truly, he knew of so many means of extortion that it would take two years, the Friar claimed, to tell them all. There could have been no hunting dog that could tell a hurt deer from a hound

1,2,3,4, Skeat, W.W.: The Student's Chaucer P. 583, Lines 1343-1344; Lines 1350-1354; Lines 1355-1358, Lines 1359-1366

better than this Summoner knew a sly lecher or adulterer or paramour. Indeed, his best income came through this knowledge and he set his whole mind to it.

> "For in this world nis dogge for the bowe,
> That can an hurt deer from an hool y-knowe,
> Bet than this Somnour knew a sly lechour,
> Or an avouter, or a paramour.
> And, for that was the fruit of al his rente,
> Therfore on it he sette al his entente." 1.

The Friar went on to tell of a time when the Summoner ever alert for prey rode to summon a widow, feigning a case, that he might rob her. As he rode and met a yeoman along the way who asked him if he was a bailiff, he returned the answer that he was because, according to the Friar, he was afraid for the filth and shame of the word, to say he was a summoner.

> " 'Artow thanne a bailly?' 'Ye!' quod he.
> He dorste nat, for verray filthe and shame,
> Say that he was a somnour, for the name." 2.

In speaking of his living and means of living the Summoner privately told the yeoman that without extortion he could not keep body and soul together; that he spared not to take unless it be too hot; that he would not be shriven for this but be-shrewed the fathers, all.

> " I spare nat to taken, god it woot,
> But if it be to hevy or to hoot.
> What I may gete in conseil prively,
> No maner conscience of that have I:
> Nere myn extorcioun, I mighte nat liven,
> Ne of swiche japes wol I nat be shriven.
> Stomak ne conscience ne knowe I noon;
> I shrewe thise shrifte-fadres everichoon." 3.

Whereupon the yeoman said that he was a very fiend dwelling in hell riding about his rounds to get all he could from men. Then in a skeptical way with a smile he looked at the Summoner and said, "You ride to win goods and profit you know nor care how--just as I do. I would go to the end of the world for prey."

1,2,3, Skeat, W. W.: The Student's Chaucer P. 583, Lines 1368-1374
P. 538, Lines 1392-1394; Page 584, Lines 1435-1442.

" I am a feend, my dwelling is in helle.
And here I ryde about my purchasing,
To wite wher men wolde yeve me anything.
My purchas is th'effect of al my rente.
Loke how thou rydest for the same entente,
To winne good, thou rekkest never how;
Right so fare I, for ryde wolde I now
Un-to the worldes ende for a preye.'" 1.

When the Summoner inquired further of the fiend or spirit, he said that hereafter the Summoner himself would come where he would know from his own experience more for himself and would be able to lecture, himself, on the subject of the various shapes taken for the purpose of capturing prey. (No doubt the Summoner himself had taken various shapes, so to speak, to win prey already). Coming into a town and up to the house of an old crone, the Summoner was after twelve pence at least or else he would serve her a summons though he really knew no fault of her:

" I wol han twelf pens, though that she be wood,
Or I wol sompne hir un-to our offyce;
And yet, god woot, of hir knowe I no vyce." 2.

Knocking at the widow's gate, declaring she has a friar or priest in there, he calls her out; he presents her with a bill of summons to kneel before the archdeacon the next day. Because of sickness or inability to go, she asks if it be possible to have a bill of indictment that she may answer through her proctor to the charge whatever it is.

" ' I have' quod he, 'of somonce here a bille;
Up peyne of cursing, loke that thou be
To-morn before the erchedeknes knee
T'answere to the court of certeyn thinges.'
'Now, lord,' quod she, 'Crist Jesu, King of kings,
So wisly helpe me, as I ne may.
I have been syk, and that ful many a day.
I may nat go fer,' quod she,'ne ryde,
But I be deed, so priketh it in my syde.
May I nat axe a libel, sir Somnour,
And answere there, by my procutour," 3.

The Summmoner readily answers that for twelve pence he would clear

1,2,3, Skeat, W. W.: The Student's Chaucer P. 584, Lines 1448-1455; P. 586, Lines 1576-1578; P. Lines 1586-1596

her although, he takes care to say, it is small profit to him--more to his master.

> " Twelf pens to me, and I wol thee acquyte.
> I shall no profit han ther-by but lyte;
> My maister hath the profit, and nat I." 1.

He urged her to hurry. Upon the widow's plea of poverty and guiltlessness the Summoner only threatened more.

> " Ne have I nat twelf pens with-inne myn hold.
> Ye knowen wel that I am povre and old;
> Kythe your almesse on me povre wrecche.'
> 'Nay than' quod he, 'the foule feend me fecche
> If I th'excuse, though thou shul be split!'" 2.

After more of this, the foul fiend who had met and accompanied him seized him screaming:

> " Thou shalt with me to helle yet to-night,
> Where thou shalt knowen of our privetee " 3.

So he took the Summoner, body and soul, to the place where summoners had their heritage and belonged, according to the Friar.

> " Body and soule, he with the devel wente
> Wher-as that somnours han hir heritage." 4.

The Friar, in closing, got in another thrust by saying that had he been given more time he could have told of many other torments that would make the people shudder although no tongue could fully describe the cursed hell. He concluded with prayer:

> " And prayeth that thise Somnours hem repente
> Of hir misdedes, er that the feend hem hente." 5.

Though Chaucer does not say, the Summoner's tainted blood strongly indicates that the Archdeacon's messenger has called too promiscuously upon certain erring women in the diocese with purposes other than the professional one of hailing them into court. (This was the one who tried to make revelations regarding the dwelling place of friars in hell, and who entertained the Canterbury Pilgrims with an unsavory but cleverly told story about

1,2,3,4,5, Skeat, W.W : The Student's Chaucer P. 586, Lines 1599-1601; P. 586, Lines 1607-1611; P. 586, Lines L636-1637; P. 586, Lines 1640-1641; P. 587, Lines 1663-1664

a friar's attempt to acquire a proportinate share in a legacy). This was the cunning observant rascal who surmised that the Archdeacon's absolution and significavit were effectual only as fraudulent means of extracting money from an offender's purse, and who, in passing this knowledge on to acquaintances taught contempt for the Court and doubtless secured a steady income for himself. Such a one was the diseased Summoner. His disease did not make the man, yet it was indicative of much that the poet leaves unrecorded, and consideration of it throws into relief the elements of character portrayed.

We are to remember as we consider this character that Chaucer's portrayals of his characters of the Age in which he lived were not exaggerated, but were true pictures representative of the actual thoughts and deeds of the people living then. We need to remind ourselves that through these representatives Chaucer expressed the conditions of his time. Thus he has revealed truly the life of this Summoner--with all its vileness.

Chaucer's vivid picture of the Pardoner has made the name familiar. And we are told on authority that there is not the slightest exaggeration in Chaucer; that he knew well the pardoners of his time, and described them exactly as they were, not adding a word which was not justified by what he saw, in order to win our laughter or to enliven his description. We should recall these authorized pardoners whose business was minutely regulated by popes and bishops, and who had real bulls with real seals to show and were entrusted by the head of the Church with care of remitting for money not the sins themselves, but part or the whole of the penance imposed for sins. The man had to be repentant and have duly confessed. The money paid the pardoner in commutation of his penance was to be sent over to papal or episcopal treasury.

The rule was that authorized pardoners were provided with patents on which visa of the bishop of the place was to be added. Exceptions soon got to be exceedingly numerous and the rule was almost forgotten. Hence we have, amongst others, a papal writing coeval with the Canterbury Tales, in which all the same abuses as are mentioned in Chaucer's poem are strongly denounced.

Those pardoners were, as declared by Boniface IX in 1390 (in Annales Ecclesiastici) sometimes friars and sometimes clerks, belonging to the regular clergy, always men of excessive impudence. "They dispensed with the ecclesiastical licence, and wandered like pedlars from one district to another, trafficking in pardons."[1] Their calling was profitable and there was much competition in it; the success of authorized pardoners attracted a crowd of others who were really vagabonds and highwaymen with no character to lose, and people who boldly carried on their trade of imposture. That Chaucer's Pardoner earned a hundred marks a year is easily understood since he asked for no licence and had no account to render but kept all his gains to himself. The Pope in his letter says that the pardoners swore--sent by the court of Rome. Chaucer said of his pardoner:

"That streight was comen fro the court of Rome."[2]

The Pope went on to say that many pardoners proclaimed in the presence of believing people who were not on their guard, their actual or supposed authorization. The poet told us the pardoner had always fine things to show; he knew how to deceive the simple people; his wallet was filled with parchments with fair signatures doubtless forged; that the common people looked on and wondered, while the parish priest was furious although silent. It is evident that these self-appointed pardoners were troubled with

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[1] Chaucer Society: Essays on Chaucer P.423

[2] Skeat, W.W.: The Student's Chaucer P.427,Line 671

few scruples, and knew how to profit by those of others. They released their clients from all kinds of vows, so their affairs prospered in proportion to the number of interdicts, prohibitions, and penances which were imposed. They passed much of their time in undoing what was done by the clergy and that without doing good to any one but themselves.

According to the Pontiff himself, they left very little to be done. They asserted that they received all this money in the name of the apostle--see. It is true that they went still further; they united and formed private associations to abuse public confidence. The Pope ordered an inquiry into all that concerned these men, their followers, accomplices, and associations, and empowered bishops to imprison without trial. These facts confirmed statements of abuses and greed of pardoners of this century.

Many of the features of Chaucer's pardoner are easily recognizable and the historical background helps us to appreciate Chaucer's accuracy.

The Archbishop ordered the decree proclaimed in every church. If priests showed slackness in zeal and allowed those men to preach without asking for official licenses, they were to be suspended for a year and the pardoner to suffer excommunication, or prison if he persevered. As to these seals to which we have just alluded, there is no doubt that there was easy and frequent falseness in regard to their use. Seals were very common, and the art of engraving them was known to many. Richard the Second in his statute (1388) took special notice of the possibility that new seals he had ordered made might be forged, although these seals were intended for no greater object than for letters allowing workmen to go from one place to another. In regard to the imitation of the very seal of greatest use to pardoners there was evidence that certain ones were brought to London for this offense.

Here is, in translation, item in Issue of the Exchequer concerning expense incurred on account of their journey: "To John Compton, one of the king's archers of his crown. In money paid to him for the expenses of himself and other archers in his retinue, coming from Gloucester to London, to conduct and deliver up Thomas Pardoner and Reginald Clerc, forgers of the seal of the Lord the Pope, then taken in those parts, in the office of the king's marshalship."[1.]

Thus it was that Chaucer's false pardoners could show so easily "bisshopis seles", or "Our liege lordes seal"[1.] upon their patents and bulls. Other decrees of popes or bishops showed strong denunciations and abuses Chaucer described. When Boniface IX found it necessary to expose openly a long list of enormities daily committed everywhere by pardoners, one of his predecessors, Urban V, had to write a long letter to the Archbishop of Canterbury with special reference to the way of life of quaestores employed by Hospitallers in England. It was the custom as stated in this document for certain orders to have attached to them a number of pardoners going here and there selling indulgences and even absolution for the benefit of their employers and their own as well. The objection against the practices of Hospitallers came from their belief that they were especially privileged and that their pardoners were exempted from all ecclesiastical interference but their own which was of course the least troublesome. Their men were practically free; they openly opposed parish priests. and commented without repression upon the grossest possible abuses. An inquiry was instituted. Hardly anything in Chaucer gave better idea of wickedness of pardoners than his description of pardoners in regard to statements already given, and hardly anything more ludicrous imagined than their procuring the excommunication of

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1. Chaucer Society, Essays on Chaucer P.430

the very parish priest who was to have had them imprisoned through his diocesan. Their trick of making speeches and sales in church on feast days at the time when mass should have been celebrated, and of pocketing the money which a numerous congregation had brought intending it for their parson was equally remarkable. To take up all the time available for Mass, much eloquence and volubility was of course necessary; and Chaucer, it is well known, was not ignorant of this. His illiterate Pardoner was very eloquent as we shall see.

The pardoners often farmed the right of selling indulgences and so had no other idea than that of getting from the public as much as possible, no matter how. They often spent their money in the worst possible fashion. They assumed ecclesiastical functions though they were not priests but only untaught laymen. They fully absolved the dead as well as the living, which was no little encouragement to sin. This glimpse of the pardoners' lives in this century helps us to appreciate the great historical value and nimute accuracy of Chaucer's descriptions.

The Pardoner's character in relation to his personal appearance, his impudent confessions of moral delinquency and fraud, and his apparently unreasonable anger against the host need further treatment. Supposedly accidental items of personal appearance which Chaucer introduced seemingly at random in presenting his characters have more significance possibly than might seem apparent. Perhaps we have not related enough the pardoner's physical peculiarities vitally to his immoral character. We read of him:

"This pardoner hadde her as yelow as wex,
But smothe it heng, as dooth a strike of flex;
By ounces henge his lokkes that he hadde,
And ther-with he his shuldres over-spradde;
But thinne it lay, by colpons oon and oon;"[1]

[1] Skeat, W.W.: The Student's Chaucer P.427, Lines 675-679

"Swiche glaringe eyen hadde he as an hare." 1.

"A voys he hadde as smal as hath a goot.
No berd hadde he, ne never sholde have," 2.

"Than peyne I me to strecche forth the nekke,
And est and west upon the peple I bekke,
As doth a dowve sitting on a berne." 3.

This person had long straight hair yellow as wax, hanging thinly spread over his shoulders, each hair; his eyes were wide open and glaring like those of a hare; his voice was high-pitched and thin like a goat's; he had no sign of a beard; and judging from what he says of himself as he was in the act of delivering one of his powerful sermons, his neck was a long scrawny one.

But is this that Chaucer gives us merely description and no more, or do the characteristics signify something deeper? Certainly before we can grasp the whole meaning of the poet's purpose in his careful delineation of the Canterbury Pilgrims or appreciate his artistry, we must acquire as far as possible a viewpoint of the fourteenth century Englishman as he looked upon the world. It is not mere chance that Chaucer the artist used these particular items of personal appearance rather than others; it is not by accident, either, that he invested the Pardoner with them rather than someone else. Here, as in other places, Chaucer knows what he is doing.

In the light of what knowledge and beliefs Chaucer's readers possessed he made the most of his physical characteristics, movements of face and body, to portray his qualities of mind and temper. According to the beliefs of the time it was possible to judge with a degree of accuracy inner character of a man from study of his form and features. According to well-defined regulations, lines of the face, shape and color of the eyes, and tone of voice could be interpreted. So Chaucer used suggestions as to

1,2,3, Skeat, W.W.: The Student's Chaucer P.427, Line 684; P.427, Lines 688-689; P.557, Lines 395-397

physical characteristics appropriate to the men and women he introduced.

Let us examine what the physiognomies may say regarding the Pardoner's features in relation to his character. Authorities Chaucer's readers might have been familiar with said that glaring eyes prominently set indicated one "given to folly, a glutton, a libertine, and drunkard."[1] Authorities said that a person with "outstanding bright eyes from which the eyelids have a tendency to withdraw and with a high pitched or shrill voice, is impudent and most dangerous."[1] In Chaucer's portrayal of the Pardoner with his high thin voice together with glaring eyes were associated also shameless impudence, gluttony, and licentiousness. Long and soft hair immoderately fine in texture and reddish or yellow in color "indicates an impoverished blood, lack of virility, and effeminacy of mind; and the sparser the hair, the more cunning and deceptive is the man."[2] A "long, slim neck is a sign of garrulity, haughtiness of spirit and of evil habits,"[2] and " a man beardless by nature is endowed with a fondness for women and for crafty dealings....repeatedly he exhibits a rare and singular intellectual cleverness."[2] The Pardoner is an abandoned rascal delighting in hypocrisy and possessed with great impudence, as we know when we hear his shameless confession and his attempt to hypnotise the host; he reveals himself as something of a glutton and a tavern reveler when he calls for cakes and ale before he can properly tell a "moral tale";[2] he is a man, too, of no mean ingenuity and of some cleverness getting a great amount of his yearly income from chicanery and fraud; his lack of beard and goat-like voice indicate at least effeminacy.

His eyes were glaring like those of a hare; he stretched forth his long thin neck like a dove; he was so proud of his long perfectly straight hair--probably smoothed with greasing--that he

1,2, Curry, W. C.: Chaucer and the Mediaeval Sciences P.57,P.68

preferred to wear simply a cap rather than a hood of his profession. "But hood, for jolitee, ne wered he noon,"[1]
The Pardoner was lecherous at least in thought and imagination, and a tavern reveler. He possessed remarkable knowledge of mob psychology, thousands of unsophisticated people flocking to hear his sermons, and behold and purchase his marvellous relics of saints. He was a shameless impudent fraud who, bringing spurious bills and pardons all hot from supreme spiritual authority at Rome, claimed to exercise power of life and death over the human soul; a cynic, armed with false relics, who offered a certain cure to men for jealousy even if their wives were strumpets; and, to women, an easy absolution from the sin of infidelity to their husbands. He spit out venom under the hue of honesty and holiness:

"Thus spitte I out my venim under hewe
Of holynesse, to seme holy and trewe."2.

Urged on by consuming avarice, he reaped a golden harvest from his practices of villainy and fraud.

"by this gaude have I wonne, yeer by yeer,
An hundred mark sith I was Pardoner." 3.

Chaucer has given us a mordant satire on the abuses practiced in the Church of his day. Let us listen more closely to what he himself says. He puts stress himself, as a Pardoner, on the use of his voice, ringing it out as a bell, for he knew by rote what he was to say (parrot fashion). His theme itself was "'Radix malorum est cupiditas'". How important a theme--important to him in winning and gaining if he was to make the people hand over their possessions.

"'Radix malorum est Cupidatas,'
First I pronounce whennes that I come." 4.

Then he told of his authority and showed his bulls one and all, but first the seal of the lord the king upon his patent in order to

1,2,3,4, Skeat, W.W.: The Student's Chaucer P. 427, Line 680; P.557, Lines 421-422; P.557, Lines 389-390; P.556, Lines 333-334.

make himself safe from bold priests or clerks or those who might be able to disturb his holy labors as he called them.

" And than my bulles shewe I alle and somme.
Our lige lordes seel on my patente,
That shewe I first, my body to warente,
That no man be so bold, ne preest ne clerk,
Me to destourbe of Cristes holy werk;" 1.

Then he talked and showed bulls of popes and cardinals, patriarchs, and bishops; and he spoke just a little in Latin to give an atmosphere of preaching and stirring men to devotion.

" And after that than telle I forth my tales,
Bulles of popes and of cardinales,
Of patriarkes, and bishoppes I shewe;
And in Latyn I speke a wordes fewe,
To saffron with my predicacioun,
And for to stire men to devocioun." 2.

Next he told of his crystal boxes filled with bones and clouts which the people thought were holy relics. He stressed with great emphasis the apparent holy value of these relics, with much devotion (to his own end and aim). He had a shoulder-bone set in latten which came from a holy Jew's sheep.

" Than shewe I forth my longe cristal stones,
Y-crammed ful of cloutes and of bones;
Reliks been they, as wenen they echoon." 3.

He told of the purifying and the miracles made possible to both animals and men by washing this bone in the spring and then drinking the water. He told of how the person so doing would have his beasts multiply and of how even jealousy might be cured even of one's wife though the man knew the truth of her fault--though she had been with two or three priests.

"And never shal he more his wyfe mistriste," 4.

He showed a mitten claiming if one placed his hand therein and offered pence his grain would be multiplied.

" Heer is a miteyn eek, that ye may see.
He that his hond wol putte in this miteyn,
He shal have multiplying of his greyn,
Whan he hat sowen, be it whete or otes,
So that he offre pens, or elles grotes." 5.

1,2,3,4,5, Skeat, W.W: The Student's Chaucer P.556, Lines 336-340
P.556, Lines 341-346; P.556, Lines 347-351; P 556, Lines 369-
P.556, Lines 372-376

Next he told of the trickery he used by which he made his hundred marks a year ever since he had been in the business. It was thus; he proceeded to tell the people that if anyone there had done a horrible sin and dared not be shriven for shame, such folk had no power or grace to make offerings to his relics. But whoever was free could come up freely and offer in God's name, and he, the Pardoner, would assoil him by his authority granted by his bull.

> " I stonde lyk a clerk in my pulpet,
> And whan the lewed peple is doun y-set,
> I preche, so as ye han herd befire,
> And telle an hundred false japes more."1.

Of his preaching all his theme was of avarice to make folks give much to him.

> " Of avaryce and of swich cursednesse
> Is al my preching, for to make hem free
> To yeve her pens, and namely un-to me." 2.

His only aim was to gain,--not for any holy purpose.

> " For my entente is not but for to winne,
> And no-thing for correccioun of sinne." 3.

He cared not a hoot for the people's souls after they had died.

> " I rek-ke never, whan that they ben beried,
> Though that her soules goon a-blake-berried!"

His sermons arose and were planned from all intent as to how to please and flatter folks so they would give most, and how to aim for promotion,--through hypocrisy and from vain-glory or hate.

> " For certes, many a predicacioun
> Comth ofte tyme of yvel entencioun;
> Som for plesaunce of folk and flaterye,
> To been avaunced by ipocrisye,
> And som for veyne glories, and some for hate." 5.

When he did not dare have it out with an enemy he stung him bitterly as he preached, and falsely defamed him, as if he were only preaching in a holy way against evil.

1,2,3,4,5, Skeat, W.W.: The Student's Chaucer P.557, Lines 391-394; P. 557, Lines 400-402; P.557, Lines 403-404; P.557, Lines 405-406; P.557, Lines 407-411

" Than wol I stinge him with my tonge smerte
In preching, so that he shal nat asterte
To been defamed falsly, if that he
Hath trespased to my brethren or to me.
For, though I telle noght his propre name,
Men shal wel knowe that is the same
By signes and by othere circumstances." 1.

He preached with only the motive of avarice.

" I preche of no-thing but for coveityse." 2.

His theme was always:

" Radix malorum est cupiditas." 3.

So he preached against the very vice he practiced--covetousness. While he was guilty he tried to get others to depart from it, only for his own ends and profit; he tried to urge others to repent, only that he might work his graft.

" Thus can I preche agayn that ame vyce
Which that I use, and that is avaryce.
But, though my-self be gilty in that sinne,
Yet can I maken other folk to twinne
From avaryce, and sore to repente.
But that is nat my principal entente.
I preche no-thing but for coveityse;" 4.

He told old stories,

" For lewed peple loven tales olde;
Swich thinges can they wel reporte and holde." 5.

He liked to get their good will. And it was easier for him to tell stories than to really preach. He would not live in poverty.

"What ? trowe ye, that whyles I may preche,
And winne gold and silver for I teche,
That I wol live in povert wilfully ?
Nay, nay, I thoghte it never trewely!" 6.

He would not even labor with his hands to bring in money. He has an easier way--he can fool people without much effort.

" I wol non of the apostles counterfete:
I wol have money, wolle, chese, and whete,
Al were it yeven of the povrest page,
Or of the povrest widwe in a village,
Al sholde hir children sterve for famyne." 7.

1,2,3,4,5,6,7, Skeat, W.W.: The Student's Chaucer P. 557, Lines 413-419; P. 557, Lines 424; P. 557, Line 426; P. 557, Lines 427-433; P.557 Lines 437-438; P. 557, Lines 439-442; P. 557, Lines 447-451.

Also, he wanted to live a life of pleasure and joyousness, not one given up to seriousness.

" Nay! I wol drinke licour of the vyne,
And have a joly wenche in every toun." 1.

It was just before the Pardoner's tale and after the Doctor's pathetic story of Virginia that the host was so overcome with pity that he said he had to have either a drink or a merry tale to ease his pain. He demanded "som mirthe or japes" 2. from the Pardoner who was quite willing to accomodate him. But instantly a protest came from the people of high rank showing their attitude of skepticism towards this person and what sort of tale he would tell.

" Nay! lat him telle us of no ribaudye:
Tel us om moral thing, that we may lere
Som wit, and thanne wol we gladly here.'
'I graunte, Y-wis,' quod he, 'but I mot thinke
Up-on som honest thing, whyl that I drinke.'" 3.

When this Pardoner came forward readily and willingly at the call of the host and spoke of seeking inspiration for a story in a nearby tavern, the gentle folk evidently expected that the Pardoner would tell a filthy or obscene story.

Even in his concluding remark at the end of his Tale there seemed to be preparation for his proposed master-stroke of deception.

"As ye were born; and, lo, sirs, thus I preche.
And Jesu Crist, that is our soules leche,
So graunte yow his pardon to receyve;
For that is best; I wol yow nat deceyve," 4.

He already revealed with amazing frankness the fraud he was accustomed to practice on his hearers; he illustrated with eloquence and dramatic power the manner in which results were obtained in his profession. He was proud of his skill. If he could hypnotize the Pilgrims to buy relics after he had declared their worthlessness and his own perfidy, it would be a crowning glory of his career. Suddenly turning to them, he said practically: "It

1,2,3,4, Skeat, W.W.: The Student's Chaucer P.557, Lines 452-453; P. 555, Line 319; P. 555 Lines 324-328; P.564, Lines 915-918

is to ignorant people I preach this way; but you are my friends, and I would ask God to grant you the pardon of Christ. I would never want to deceive you. Now is your opportunity to come and kiss this true relic." Since he did not have his customary audience he was compelled to change his appeal to the Pilgrims themselves. But he did not reckon with the host who, angry at being taken for a fool, hurled withering sarcasm and scorn at the Pardoner who sang with the Summoner his gay song; "'com hider, love, to me,'"[1.] and who boasted with brazen affrontery that he would drink wine "And have a joly wenche in every toun."[2.]

Even such a character as the Wife of Bath, low-down as she was, had the unbounded admiration of the Pardoner. He approved heartily her eloquent sermon against virginity and in favor of the proper use of God-given powers of the body to promote carnal pleasures, even interrupting her flow of language to applaud her.

> " 'Now dame,' quod he, 'by god and by seint John,
> Ye been a noble prechour in this cas! " 3.

This was the Pardoner, the vendor of indulgences,--a picture no more flattering than the Friar's and Summoner's. He it was who sold, to the great contempt of the poet, a piece of the Virgin's veil, a bit of the sail of St. Peter's boat, holy pigges bones; and with these relics he made more money in each parish in one day than the parson himself made in two months.

> " For in his male he hadde a pilwe-beer,
> Which that, he seyde, was our lady veyl:
> He seyde, he hadde a gobet of the seyl
> That Seynt Peter hadde, whan that he wente
> Up-on the see, til Jesu Crist him hente.
> He hadde a croys of latoun, ful of stones,
> And in a glas he hadde pigges bones.
> But with thise relikes, whan that he fond
> A povre person dwelling up-on lond,
> Up-on a day he gat him ore moneye
> Than that the parson gat in monthes tweye." 4.

With flattering deceit he made the parson and people dupes. He

1,2,3,4, Skeat, W.W.: The Student's Chaucer P. 427, line 672; P. 557, Line 453; P. 567, Lines 164-165; P. 427, Lines 694-704

had a smooth tongue and could read well and preach smoothly to win silver and, best of all, could sing an offertory.

> " But alderbest he song an offertorie;
> For wel he wiste, whan that song was songe,
> He moste preche, and wel affayle his tonge,
> To winne silver, as he ful wel coude;
> Therefore he song so meriely and loude." 1.

His life consisted in false praise and insincere commendation, treacherous and dishonorable schemes, double faced and faithless procedure towards others:

> "And thus, with feyned flaterye and japes,
> He made the person and the peple his apes." 2.

In Chaucer's picture of the poor Parson, he delineates the life of the true, holy and devout clergyman. Yet, we know that this was not the picture of the large share of those clergy living in his time. After seeing the vileness and falseness, the evil and luxury existing then, this epitome, in connection with the poor Parson, of sound doctrine in such an age still bigoted and narrow though beginning to broaden, rebukes the lewdness and immorality prevalent. As I read this expression of what the true parson's life should have been, in the light of the corruption which actually was present, the contrast is emphasized to my mind, and I find myself interpreting this portrayal to the emphasis of what was not current but which should have been. Thus, though in a sense indirectly, yet no less forcefully, I interpret this representation as showing how far the clergy were below the standard they ought to have reached; thus, to me there is a skeptical attitude strengthened almost more strongly than when I read merely of the evils and corruption alone as in certain other portrayals. Perhaps, after all, it is natural for us to see faults in ourselves or in others more distinctly as the higher level is held up before us. Evil sometimes looks more pronounced when compared to the pure and good. When beside all the corruption and infection is

1,2, Skeat, W. W.: The Student's Chaucer P.428, Lines 710-714;
P. 428, Lines 705-706

placed a picture of what should have been, it makes the low life look lower and it deepens the destructive and pernicious view of life being lived.

Indeed, the likeness of this godly Parson who discoursed on penance, contrition, confession, and the seven deadly sins with their remedies, is believed by many to have been inspired by and based upon Wycliffe himself whose skepticism has already been set forth. We already know that Wycliffe was a reformer and attacked not only the corruption and evil practices of the Church but the Church itself. We need to re-emphasize the fact that Chaucer was not against the Church itself but its disastrous and woeful practices; also the fact that he was not a reformer. When we speak of Chaucer as one who led on to the Reformation, we mean that through his works portraying evil, the false, and the superficial connected with the Church practices, a reformation of these practices was encouraged which finally proved to lead on to a greater Reformation.

In the picture of the ideal Parson and his life, there was opportunity for decided satire, and expression of the failings in that age. There was opportunity to expose the positive decay and pollution through contrast between the existing procedure and the genuine; between the shallow and the just.

There were striking likenesses between this good Parson and Wycliffe. More than one critic declares this person had decidedly Lollardish traces, and that it is Wycliffe's own portrait. However, to notice characteristics suggested as Lollardish is not to say that the Parson was a Lollard, by any means. Some scholars refer principally to the description in the General Prologue, although there are two other places where we find striking suggestions of characteristics of Wycliffe. Let us look

first at the significance of the General Prologue. As to the source of the gospel the Parson preached, there are three passages which emphatically emphasized his doctrines as being taken from the gospel:

> "That Cristes gospel trewely wolde preche; "[1]
> "Out of the gospel he tho wordes caughte;" 2.
>
> "But Cristes lore, and his apostles twelve,
> He taughte, and first he folwed it himselve."[3]

This was, as we know, a distinguishing characteristic of the Wycliffites; for the gospel was the foundation-stone of their doctrine and sermons. Wycliffe attempted to draw general attention to it. He and his associates translated the Bible, and it was with this sword and shield that he attacked the Roman dogmas and statutes, and refuted the accusation of heresy. But the orthodox Catholic clergy, looked upon as the only source of Christian truth in Chaucer's time, moved along on scholastic theology. In their sermons, instead of preaching the gospel they often amused their hearers by telling fables, romances, and jests.

The Parson, too, was a holy man making the gospel his very rule of life and thought.

"He taughte, and first he folwed it himselve."[4]

The whole prologue proves it but we may quote especially;

"But riche he was of holy thought and werk."[5]

Wycliffe and his disciples distinguished themselves by irreproachable lives; even their enemies had to acknowledge this.

Another new characteristic was brought forth:

> "He was also a lerned man, a clerk, " 6.

Wycliffe and his followers did not believe that learning was not necessary for holy purposes; they cherished it. However, ignorance reigned in the ranks of their antagonists. Another trait was:

> "Up-on his feet, and in his hand a staf." 7.

It is said that Archbishop Courtesan in 1382, when trying to pass

1,2,3,4,5,6,7, Skeat, W.W.: The Student's Chaucer P. 425, Line 481; P. 425, Line 498; P. 425, Lines 527-528; P. 425, Line 528; P. 425; Line 479; P. 425, Line 480, P. 425, Line 495

the bill against heretics, stated in a speech in Parliament that the Wycliffite itinerant clergy walked about in plain apparel of coarse cloth, barefoot, with staff in hand.

Here was one who was poor in goods but rich in holy thought and deed. He was diligent and patient in adversity. He was loath to excommunicate for unpaid tithes, but would rather give than take from his people. His parish was wide, but he did not neglect visiting the ones farthest away, nor the poorest; neither those in sickness or misfortune, going even on foot.

> "Wyd was his parisshe, and houses fer a-sonder,
> But he ne lafte nat, for reyn ne thonder,
> In siknes nor in meschief, to visyte
> The ferreste in his parisshe, muche and lyte." 1.

He gave a noble example to his flock living what he taught, not going about practicing what was most remote from his preaching. He took his words right from the gospel, saying if gold rusted, what would iron do ?

> "This noble ensample to his sheep he yaf,
> That first he wroghte, and afterward he taughte;
> Out of the gospel he tho wordes caughte;
> And this figure he added eek ther-do,
> That if gold ruste, what shal iren do ? 2.

He reasoned that if a priest upon whom people ought to be able to trust be foul, little wonder an ignorant layman be corrupt. A priest should show cleanness of living to his sheep:

> "For if a preest be foul, on whom we truste,
> No wonder is a lewed man to ruste;
> And shame it is, if a preest take keep,
> A shiten shepherde and a clene sheep.
> Wel oghte a preest ensample for to yive,
> By his clennesse, how that his sheep shold live." 3.

What a skilful means whereby Chaucer's good Parson pours forth views which mark a skeptical attitude toward abuses of the time, and points to improved practices and motives at the same time! The Parson went on to say that the righteous churchman would not

1,2,3, Skeat, W.W.: The Student's Chaucer P. 425, Lines 491-494
P. 425, Lines 496-500; P. 425, Lines 501-506

leave his sheep in the mire while he, thinking only of gain for himself ran to London to get some easy office of good profit. No, he would stay and guard his fold by example and through protection that they might be kept safe from wolves. He was no hireling but a true shepherd:

"He sette nat his benefice to hyre,
And leet his sheep encombred in the myre,
And ran to London, un-to seynt Poules,
To seken him a chaunterie for soules,
Or with a bretherhed to been withholde;
But dwelte at hoom, and kepte wel his folde,
So that the wolf ne made it nat miscarie;
He was a shepherde and no mercnarie." [1]

He was holy and virtuous, and discreet in his teaching. His great work in life was to draw people to heaven by his good life and example:

"And though he holy were, and vertuous,
He was to sinful man nat despitous,
Ne of his speche daungerous ne dinge,
But in his teching discreet and benigne.
To drawen folk to heven by fairnesse
By good ensample, was his bisinesse:
But it were any persone obstinat,
What-so he were, of heigh or lowe estat,
Him wolde he snibben sharply for the nones, [2]
A bettre preest, I trowe that nowher noon is."

But we spoke of two other particular places where there are striking suggestions of characteristics of a Wycliffite. One is in the Shipman's Prologue; the other, the Parson's Prologue. These are not mentioned with a view to claiming the Parson a Lollard, but to point out certain characteristics some people think resemble the Lollards. The first points to Wycliffite characteristics when the holy man earnestly but mildly rebuked the host for taking the Lord's name in vain, and when the host exclaimed derisively:

".................'O Hankin be ye there?
I smelle a loller in the wind,' quod he.
'How! good men' quod our hoste, 'herkneth me;" [3]

1,2,3, Skeat, W.W. The Student's Chaucer P. 425, Lines 507-514
P. 425, Lines 515-524; P. 492, Lines 1172-1174

As the Parson did not reply, the host repeated the invective as if to try to put up with it.

> "Abdydeth, for goddes digne passioun,
> For we shal han a predicacioun;
> This loller heer wil prechen us som-what.'" 1.

The Shipman said:

> "'Nay, by my fader soule! that shal be nat,'
> Seyde the Shipman; 'heer he shal nat preche,
> He shal no gospel glosen heer ne teche,
> We leve alle in the grete god,' quod he,
> 'He wolde sowen som difficultee,
> Or springen cokkel in our clene corn;" 2.

Three times he protested against the expected sermon, against his gospel glosing that would disturb peaceful harmony of the Pilgrims. It was the Wycliffites who used to glose on the gospel in those times; who grounded it on a doctrine differing from that of the Church, and which was sure to produce violent disputes when it was pronounced before orthodox ears.

The Parson's Prologue pictures for us the host who shortly before used very passionate language against the monk as very respectful to the Parson. After others have told tales, in a conciliatory way he asks the Parson:

> "I prey to god, so yeve him right good chaunce,
> That telleth this tale to us lustily." 3.

Perhaps the quiet dignity had made an impression or perhaps there was an admiration for the one enabled to suffer insults so quietly.

> "Sir preest, 'quod he, 'artow a vicary ?
> Or art a person ? sey sooth, by thy fey!" 4.

So said the host, somewhat doubtful perhaps, owing to the Parson's peculiar dress. We remember a vicar took only small tithes of

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1. Skeat, W.W.,: The Student's Chaucer P. 492, Lines 1175-1177
2,3,4. Skeat, W.W.: The Student's Chaucer P. 492, Lines 1178-1183
P. 674, Lines 20-21; P. 674, Lines 22-23

his parish while the great ones went to monastery or cathedral. The Parson or the Rector took both the great and the small tithes. Perhaps the host thought he might have done the Parson a wrong and was anxious to clear himself of suspicion by explaining his real station. But the Parson did not take the opportunity. The host, instead of growing impatient as was his wont passed over the painful silence saying:

> "Be what thou be, ne breke thou nat our pley;" 1.

He even showed good feeling;

> "For trewely, me thinketh, by thy chere,
> Thou sholdest knitte up wel a greet matere." 2.

The Parson showed his type and character when he said:

> "Thou getest fable noon y-told for me;
> For Paul, that wryteth unto Timothee,
> Repreveth hem that weyven soothfastnesse,
> And tellen fables and swich wrecchednesse.
> Why sholde I sowen draf out of my fest,
> Whan I may sowen whete, if that me lest?
> For which I seye, if that yow list to here
> Moralitee and vertuous matere,
> And thanne that ye wol yeve me audience,
> I wol ful fayn, at Cristes reverence,
> Do yow pleasaunce, leefful, as I can,
> But trusteth wel, I am a Southren man,
> I can not geste--rum, ram, ruf--by lettre,
> Ne, god wot, rym holde I but litel bettre,
> And therfor, if yow list, I wol nat glose.
> I wol yow telle a mery tale in prose
> To knitte up al this feeste, and make an ende.
> And Jesu, for his grace, wit me sende
> To shewe yow the wey, in this viage,
> Of thilke parfit glorious pilgrimage
> That highte Jerusalem celestial." 3

No fabulous tales does he promise. Paul has reproved those who, departing from soothfastness, told fables and wretched legends. It is not his purpose to sow chaff, but wheat. He promised to bring pleasure in so far as was possible in reverence to Christ.

1,2,3, Skeat, W.W.: The Student's Chaucer P.674. Line 24;P674 Lines 27-28; P. 74, Lines 31-51

He would tell a tale, and he called for His grace for wisdom to point out the way of a greater Pilgrimage to Jerusalem the celestial, thus expressing his loyalty and faithfulness to his high calling,

There has been mentioned by some a religious skepticism of Criseyde, in Troilus and Criseyde. Her father was Appollo's priest; but she showed scant reverence for his sacred office and little faith in revelations the deity vouchsafed. She protested that oracles were ambiguous; that the gods spoke with crafty double meanings, telling many lies for one truth. Perhaps there were no gods exeept those shaping in man's timid soul. We shall consider skepticism shown through this poem largely under another phase.

Chaucer's democratic spirit expressed a skeptical attitude towards the traditional idea that rank and nobility depended merely upon rank or birth in families of the "gentle." This was contrary to the old idea of true nobility being born in a knightly class necessarily, and was a blow to the old idea of class distinction. As already discussed, we have seen the weakening of the classes and chivalrous rank, and the break-down of the manorial system. We know that the basis of such a system was decaying, and the new spirit, more democratic in nature, was to abolish the traditional class distinctions. The more democratic spirit and attitude including consideration of the more common class of people was a reflection through Chaucer of the skepticism of the whole age, as conditions broke down the old-time chivalry towards a chivalry born of good deeds. The new basis of chivalry was to enlarge the possibilities especially of heretofore middle or lower class.

Chaucer's skepticism is shown in more than the religious realm.

He strongly emphasized a skepticism towards the old limitations which bound down the opportunities of certain people or a "class." He believed in more opportunities even for those who were kept from knighthood, under the old restrictions of birth. Through Chaucer's work shines his spirit of fairness for all and a larger interpretation, and truer one, of nobility. Although his charactess are dramatizations of life they are true dramatizations from the life of the century and they express what people were actually thinking and feeling and doing. Chaucer makes them express the attitudes of the day towards each other and towards changing conditions and newer spirit, even though they are not necessarily his own opinions.

In the Parson's tale, the story by one who was such a contrast in his life and works to those religious workers so corrupt; the one who showed up so clearly what the many actually were not but what they ought to have been; the one who, according to some, was a likeness of the great Wycliffe so skeptical of the old.--this person, said that to pride one's self on gentle birth was folly, for gentility of body often destroyed gentility of soul; and that all were of one nature, rich or poor.

> "Eek for to pryde him of his gentrye if ful
> greet folye; for ofte tyme the gentrye of the
> body binimeth the gentrye of the soule; and
> eek we ben alle of a fader and of a moder;
> and alle we been o nature roten and corrupt,
> both riche and povre" 1.

He went on to say that there was a true gentility where there were virtues and moral excellencies to adorn the life of a man; and that over whatever man sin had master, he was even a serf

1, Skeat, W.W.: "The Student's Chaucer" P 690, Line 461; P 690 Line 463

to sin, no matter what his birth or rank.

"For truste wel, that over what man sinne
hath maistrie, he is verray cherle to sinne." 1.

He said the real tokens of gentility were deeds in the life of a man of gentility; the practice of virtue, courtesy, purity, generosity; and kindness and benignity, claiming nothing more seemly in one of high estate than graciousness and mercy.

"For unto vertu longeth dignitee,
And noght the revers, saufly dar I deme,
Al were he mytre, croune, or diameme.
This firste stok was ful of rightwisnesse,
Trewe of his word, sobre, pitous, and free,
Clene of his goste, and loved besinesse,
Against the vyce of slouthe, in honestee;
And, but his heir love vertu, as dide he,
He is noght gentil, thogh he riche seme,
Al were he mytre, croune, or diademe." 2.

Vice might be heir to ancient wealth, but as perceived by men, no one could bequeath to his heir virtuous nobleness which is peculiar to no one station, except the Father, first in majesty, and who makes one his heir who can please him even though he wear crown or diadem.

"Vyce may well be heir to old richesse;
But ther may no man, as men may wel see,
Bequethe his heir his vertuous noblesse
That is appropred unto no degree,
But to the firste fader in magestee,
That maketh him his heir, that can him queme,
Al were he mytre, croune, or diadem." 3.

In the Clerk's Tale, we saw the lord of fine lineage and the gentlest birth of London, full of honor and courtesy, and noticed his attitude when he came to choose a wife. He declared that goodness comes from God and not from the strain or stock which begets. He would choose his wife and he demanded that his people assure him they would honor her always in every way as if she were from the noble class of an emperor's daughter.

1. Skeat, W.W.: *The Student's Chaucer* P. 690, Line 463
2,3, Skeat, W.W.: *The Student's Chaucer* P.122, Lines 5-14
P. 123- Lines 15-21

"Bountee comth al of god, nat of the streen
Of which they been engendred and y-bore;
I truste in goddes bountee, and therfore
My mariage and myn estaat and reste
I him bitake; he may don as him leste." 1.

"But I yow preye, and charge up-on your lyf,
That what wyf that I take, ye me assure
To worshipe hir, whyl that hir lyf may dure,
In word and werk, bothe here and every-where,
As she an emperoures doghter were." 2.

He chose a girl whose classification had been one of poverty.

"For povreliche y-fostred up was she," 3.

Poor though this girl had been she was fair to the eye, and beautiful in virtue:

"But for to speke of vertuous beautee,
Than was she oon the faireste under sonne;" 4.

Thus, the lord wedded not lowly, but royally, even a poor girl. He was farseeing because he saw beyond a low degree to virtue hidden underneath, and a true gentility.

"Thus Walter lowly, nay but royally,
Wedded with fortunat honestetee, " 5.

"And for he saugh that under low degree
Was ofte vertu hid, the peple him helde" 6

The idea that Christ is exalted as the first Father of gentleness was enlarged on by the Tale of the Wife of Bath, who, when her husband was dissatisfied partly because of her low lineage, stated a feeling against the traditional idea of high rank by birth. She told him that he was wrong to base gentility on ancient wealth and merely the old knightly breeding; that such was only arrogance and not worth a hen.

"But for ye speken of swich gentillesse
As is descended out of old richesse,
That therefore sholden ye be gentil men,
Swich arrogance is nat worth an hen." 7.

She said something like this: "If you want to see those of true

1,2,3,4,5,6,7 Skeat, W.W.L The Student's Chaucer, P.598, Lines 157-161; P. 598, Lines 164-168; P.599, Line 213; P. 599, Lines 211-212; P. 601, Lines 421-422; P. 601, Lines 425-426, P. 479, Lines 1109-1112.

gentility, look to those who are virtuous within and without and who do gentle deeds-such are those of real gentility."

> "Loke who that is most vertuous alway,
> Privee and apert, and most entendeth ay
> To do the gentil dedes that he can,
> And tak him for the grettest gentil man." 1.

Christ willed that we claim gentility from Him, not from wealth of ancestors. For though the heritage by which we claim high station descend to us from ancestors, they cannot bequeath us virtuous living which made them gentle men.

> "Crist wol, we clayme of him our gentillesse,
> Nat of our eldres for hir old richesse
> For thogh they yeve us al hir heritage,
> For which we clayme to been of heigh parage,
> Yet may they nat biquethe, for no-thing,
> To noon of us hir vertuous living,
> That made hem gentil men y-called be;" 2.

She quoted the wise poet of Florence, Dante, in his rhyme expressing nobility:

> "'Ful selde up ryseth by his branches smale
> Prowesse of man; for god, of his goodnesse,
> Wol that of him we clayme our gentillesse;" 3.

She went on to say the only things we can really claim for our ancestors are things temporal that may be injured and impaired by men. If nobility could be planted by nature in a family down the generations, the descendants would never cease doing noble offices, and could never do sinful acts.

> "For of our eldres may we no-thing clayme
> But temporel thing, that man may hurte and mayme.
> Eek every wight wot this as wel as I,
> If gentillesse were planted naturelly
> Un-to a certeyn linage, doun the lyne,
> Privee ne apert, than wolde they never fyne
> To doon of gentillesse the faire offyce;
> They mighte do no vileinye or vyce." 4.

She said if one take fire into the darkest house, let the doors be shut and leave the place, the fire would burn as brightly as if thousands were beholding it. It would hold its natural office

1,2,3,4, Skeat, W.W.: *The Student's Chaucer* P. 579, Lines 1113-1116
P. 579, Line 117-1123; P. 579, Lines 1128-113-; P. 580
Lines 1131-1138

till it died. She went on to say we may thus see how nobility descends not from ancient possessions since folks do not always perform its works, as the fire. Men often see even a lord's son do shameful and base deeds. But whoever has esteem for gentility because one was born of a noble house and had virtuous and noble ancestors yet does not perform deeds of gentility nor follow after the gentle ancestors, is not noble even though he be duke or baron, for base deeds of sin make a churl.

> "Heer may ye see wel, how that genterye
> Is nat annexed to possessioun,
> Sith folk ne doon hir operacioun
> Alway, as dooth the fyr, lo! in his kinde.
> For, god it woot, men may wel often finde
> A lordes sone do shame and vileinye;
> And he that wol han prys of his gentrye
> For he was boren of a gentil hous,
> And hadde his eldres noble and vertuous,
> And nil him-selven do no gentil dedis,
> Ne folwe his gentil, be he duk or erl;
> For vileyns sinful dedes make a cherl." 1.

For gentility would be renown of one's ancestors for their high worthiness which is extraneous to the person. Gentility comes only from God. True gentility comes of divine grace and was not bequeathed to us with earthly station:

> "Thy gentillesse cometh fro god allone;
> Than comth our verray gentillesse of grace." 2.

The speaker said to think of Tullius Hostilus who rose from poverty to high nobility. She told her husband to read Seneca and Boethius to see expressed truly that he who does noble deeds is noble:

> "Thenketh how noble, as seith Valerius,
> Was thilke Tullius Hostilius,
> That out of povert roos to heigh noblesse.
> Redeth Senek, and redeth eek Boece,
> Ther shul ye seen expres that it no drede is,
> That he is gentil that doth gentil dedis;" 3.

Though her ancestors were poor and unlettered, through God's grace she will be virtuous, thus noble in living virtuously and abandoning evil:

> "Al were it that myne auncestres were rude,
> Yet may the hye god, and so hope I,
> Grante me grace to liven vertuously

1,2,3, Skeat, W.W. The Student's Chaucer, P. 580, Lines 1146-1158; P. 580, Lines 1162-1164, P. 580, Lines 1165-1170

Thanne am I gentil, whan that I biginne
To liven vertuously and weyve sinne." 1.

Indeed, Chaucer was no stickler for conventionalities, who made righteousness the standard of gentleness or nobility and pointed to Christ as the first true gentleman.

Chaucer was against the superficial and the false and all not based upon the Truth. All that is false and untrue, he is against in favor of Truth itself and knowledge of Truth for one's self as a basis for one's life and actions in religious and all fields. The feeling of the overthrow of ignorance and superstition was coming to the fore. It was the old medieval life with its fabrication and counterfeit that Chaucer was opposed to; there was much in his age emphasizing fabrication and counterfeit; Chaucer was not in favor of habits or customs based upon or encouraging the superficial. It is because of his love of Truth and emphasis of the knowledge of Truth without its sham and shackles that he was skeptical of the unintelligence and trifling delusion and pretence of his day with all its tricks and fraud and clap-trap. He felt that many of the evils of his time such as pride, flattery, wealth, and covetousness were all concerned with and based upon a transitory, empty foundation, upon nothing steadfast, enduring and unchangeable.

In Truth we see reflected Chaucer's spirit. He said to flee from the crowd and live with truth; to be satisfied with what goods one had though little, for hoarding would buy hate, and prosperity often, blindness. Lust not after more than you should have. You who try to command other people, work yourself towards the Truth which is that which will bring freedom.

"Flee fro the prees, and dwelle with sothfastnesse,
Suffyce unto thy good, though hit be smal;
For hord hath hate, and climbing tikelnesse,
Prees hath envye, and wele blent overal;
Savour no more than thee bihove shal;
Werk wel thy-self, that other folk canst rede;
And trouthe shal delivere, hit is no drede." 1.

1. Skeat, W.W.: The Student's Chaucer P. 122, Lines 1-7

Do not doubt that it is Truth which will bring freedom. Go forth pilgrim, and go forth, beast out of stall, no more to be bound in and limited by ignorance and falseness, but to be free. Knowing the true native land, thank God for all, letting your spirit lead you to freedom.

"Forth, pilgrim, forth! Forth, beste, out of thy stal!
Know thy contree, look up, thank God of al;
Hold the hye wey, and lat thy gost thee lede;
And trouthe shal delivere, hit is no drede." 1.

No longer be a brute-beaste blindly led, or a slave; cry mercy to Him who made you from nothing, and with prayer, Truth itself shall make freedom.

"Therefore, thou vache, leve thyn old wrecchednesse
Unto the worlde; leve now to be thral;
Crye him mercy, that of his hy goodnesse
Made thess of noght, and in especial
Draw unto him, and pray in general
For thee, and eek for other, hevenlich made;
And trouthe shal delivere, hit is no drede." 2.

Thus, the good counsel of Chaucer in praise of Truth which was so strong a characteristic of the newer spirit and world, as old ignorance was being thrown over and more knowledge of the truth being demanded and received in every realm.

In the Lak of Stedfastnesse, we see a reflection of the state of affairs with a skeptical note. The world is false and deceitful; word and deed are not alike; the world seems upside down from wilfulness and corruption, so that all seems lost from the lack of steadfastness.

"And now hit is so fals and deceivable,
That word and deed, as in conclusioun,
Ben no-thing lyk, for turned up so doun
Is al this world for mede and wilfulnesse,
That al is lost for lak of stedfastnesse." 3.

Clearsightedness seems blinded by covetousness; steadfastness is lacking:

"..al is lost for lak of stedfastnesse." 4.

1,2,3,4, Skeat, W.W.: The Student's Chaucer, P. 122, Lines 18-21
P. 122, Lines 22-27; P. 123, Lines 3-7; P. 123, Line 21

In Lenvoy to King Richard, there is a plea to the prince for honorableness and hatred of extortion, an appeal for fidelity and worth, and steadfastness in his influence of and for the people;

"O prince, desyre to be honourable,
Cherish thy folk and hate extorcioun!
Suffre no thing, that may be reprevable
To thyn estat, don in thy regioun.
Shew forth thy swerd of castigacioun,
Dred God, do law, love trouthe and worthinesse,
And wed thy folk agein to stedfastnesse." 1.

We see a lauding of truth. Chaucer goes to the source to purify; that the light of Truth may be the fountain from which enlightened motives and actions will come making lives based upon Truth rather than ignorance and sham, in the various fields of activity.

Now, we are to look at the note of skepticism sounded towards the alchemist who wasted his own substance and that of his dupes trying to turn silver to gold; we see an emphasis of the false-hearted wretchedness and deception practiced in Chaucer's time. I am referring to the Canon's Yeoman's overtaking the Pilgrimage and his talk with all he divulges. The yeoman, after putting his master to flight by his frank confessions, told the tale of another rogue of the same sort. The yeoman told his hearers that in the art of his canon, workers such as he groped on, but failed, for all in the end was amiss. He went on to tell how they deluded many folks and borrowed gold by the pound making people think they could make two pounds from one. But it was false:

"To mochel folk we doon illusioun,
And borwe gold, be it a pound or two,
Or ten, or twelve, or many sommes mo,
And make hem wennen, at the leeste weye,
That of a pound we coude make tweye!
Yet is it fals." 2.

The Yeoman went on to tell of the craft how they seemed wondrous wise and apparently were learned; but they really failed in the end. Nothing could help; all labor was to no avail:

1,2, Skeat, W.W. The Student's Chaucer P. 123, Lines 21-28;
P. 658, Lines 673-678

"Nought helpeth us, our labour is in veyn." 1.

The cost was gone too.

"For lost is al our labour and travayle,
And al the cost, a twenty devel weye,
Is lost also, which we upon it leye." 2.

He went on to call this a cursed craft and a waste of money even for the rich who would lose all they might spend. Whoever might want to practice it would sooner or later display his folly.

"This cursed craft who-so wil exercyse,
He shal no good han that him may suffyse;
For al the good he spendeth ther-aboute,
He lese shal, ther-of have I no doute." 3.

For whether monk or friar, priest or canon or any other, though he study day and night:

"In lernying of this elvish nyce lore,
Al is in veyn, and parde, mochel more! " 4.

To the learned and unlearned failure comes as a result:

"Y-lyke wel, when they han al y-do;
This is to seyn, they faylen bothe two." 5.

He further said:

"But al thing which that shyneth as the gold
Nis nat gold, as that I have herd it told;
Ne every appel that is fair at ye
Ne is nat good, what-so men clappe or crye
Right so, lo! fareth it amonges us;
He that semeth the wysest, by Jesus!
Is most fool, whan it cometh to the preef;
And he that semeth trewest is a theef;" 6.

Then he told a story of the falseness of a canon who could infect a whole town. His infinite fallaciousness no one could fully tell about in a thousand years it was so great.

"Ther is a chanoun of religioun
Amonges us, wolde infecte al a toun
Though it as greet were as was Ninivee,
Rome, Alisaundre, Troye, and othere three.
His sleightes and his infinit falsenesse
Ther coude no man wryten, as I gesse,
Thogh that he mighte liven a thousand yeer." 7.

1,2,3,4,5,6,7, Skeat, W.W.: The Student's Chaucer P. 660, Line 777; P. 660, Lines 781-783; P. 660, Lines 830-833; P. 660, Lines 842-843; P. 660, Lines 850-851; P. 662, Lines 962-969; P. 662, Lines 972-978

In fact, in all the world there was not another alive who could come up to him in falsehood;

"In al this world of falshede nis his peer;" 1.

He had such cunning terms and spake his words so slyly in communicating with men that he would win one unless it were a fiend (as he himself was).

"For in his termes so he wolde his winde,
And speke his wordes in so sly a kinde,
Whan he commune shal with any wight,
That he wol make him doten anon right,
But it a feend be, as him-selven is." 2.

Yet he was so clever he fooled men so they would walk miles to seek him, noght knowing his falsity.

"And yet men ryde and goon ful many a myle
Him for to seke and have his aqueyntaunce,
Noght knowinge of his false governaunce." 3

Thus he went on showing skepticism of the false practices of this rogue, this Judas.

The false canon cleverly duped the priest making him think that he would tell him secrets of alchemy, after first fooling the priest into believing that the canon was an honest man.

" 'What! 'quod this chanoun, 'sholde I be untrewe ?
Nay, that were thing y-fallen al of-newe.
Trouthe is a thing that I wol ever kepe
In-to my grave, and elles god forbede;" 4.

See what irony Chaucer uses when he has this false character, who schemes and lies so cleverly all the time, say so innocently such words as he has just said. We know from his trickery all through the story that all his words and actions are only blinds to a perfidious end.

The Yeoman, in telling of the rogue, says that he is a very root of treachery who delights in fiendish thoughts, mischief, and falseness.

1,2,3,4, Skeat, W.W.: The Student's Chaucer P 662, Line 979
P. 622, Lines 980-984; P. 662, Lines 987,989; P. 663
Lines 1042-1046

"And that ful sone I wol it verifye
In this chanoun, rote of al trecherye,
That ever-more delyt hath and gladnesse--
Swich feendly thoughtes in his herte impresse-
How Cristes peple he may to meschief bringe;
God kepe us from his fals dissimulinge! " 1.

The priest himself was a victim of covetousness and was utterly blinded by the smoothness and knavery of the canon who was to get his money and then depart.

"O sely preest! O sely innocent!
With coveityse anon thou shalt be blent!.
O gracelees, ful blind is thy conceit,
No-thing ne artow war of the deceit
Which that this fox y-shapen hath to thee! " 2.

"To tellen thyn unwit and thy folye,
And eek the falsnesse of that other wrecche,
As ferforth as that my conning may strecche." 3.

Of the deceiver the Yeoman said:

"He hath bitrayed folkes many tyme;
Of his falshede it dulleth me to ryme.
Ever whan that I speke of his falshede;
For shame of him my chekes wexen rede; " 4.

This tricky canon took pains to attempt to prove all the time that he was not false, thus fooling his victims into thinking he must be honest, although at the same time he slipped in his trickery, while they looked another way. He cleverly held their attention to what they supposed was most honest. So in his methods he beguiled them all the way through. When he got the priest busy, he himself, the foul fiend, the false canon had a contrivance he used unbeknown to the priest. His aim was to beguile the priest, as he did, before he finished. It was his business; he had it all planned and plotted; he lived by this foul means.

"This fals chanoun, the foule feen him feeche! " 5.

"On his falshed fayn wolde I me wreke,
If I wiste how; but he is heer and ther:
He is so variaunt, he abit no-wher.
But taketh heed now, sirs, for goddes love' " 6.

1,2,3,4,5,6, Skeat, W.W.: The Students Chaucer P. 663, Lines 1068-1073; P. 663, Lines 1076-1080; P.663, Lines 1085-1087; P.663 Lines 1092-1095; P. 664, Line 1159; P. 664, Lines 1173-1176

Of the Canon the Yeoman said, as he busied the priest preparatory to duping him again:

> "....the devel out of his skin
> Him terve, I pray to god, for his falshede;
> For he was ever fals in thoght and dede;" 1.

The Yeoman said his tongue could not express the duplicity of such a canon, the "rote of al cursednesse." 2. He took pains to seem what he was not; he seemed friendly, but was a fiend:

> "He semed freendly to hem that knewe him noght,
> But he was feendly bothe in herte and thoght.
> It werieth me to telle of his falsnesse,
> And natheless yet wol I it expresse,
> To th'entente that men may be war therby," 3.

He continued,

> "..........and al nas but a jape;
> Right as him liste, the preest he made his ape;" 4.

Finally, the priest believing he could buy the receipt with money, gave the sum demanded to the Canon, and bade farewell. But:

> "Al his werking nas but fraude and deceit." 5.

And, after paying his money for the receipt he found:

> "Of this receit, far-wel! it wolde nat be!
> Lo, thus byjaped and bigyled was he!" 6.

See the skeptical attitude portrayed in the words of the speaker when he refers to the misty terms used in the blind craft. The people in this business chatter like jays and put stress on polishing terms, but they never attain their end.

> "Philosophres speken so mistily
> In this craft, that men can nat come therby,
> For any wit that men han now a-dayes.
> They mowe wel chiteren, as doon thise jayes,
> And in her termes sette hir lust and peyne,
> But to hir purpos shul they never atteyne." 7.

Lo, this is what turns man's joy to anger and grief, and empties great purses. Whoever follows this craft, leave it, or else lose

1,2,3,4,5,6,7, Skeat, W.W.: The Student's Chaucer P. 666, Lines 1273-1275; P. 666, Line 1301; P. 666, Lines 1302-1306; P. 666, Lines 1312-1313; P. 667, Line 1367; P. 667, Lines 1384-1385 P. 667, Lines 1394-1399

all. You will never gain an end in it.

> "To multiplye, and bringe his good to naught!
> Lo! swich a lucre is in this lusty game,
> A mannes mirthe it wol torne un-to grame,
> And empten also grete and hevy purses,
> And maken folk for to purchasen curses
> Of hem, that han hir good therto y-lent.
> O! fy! for sham! they that han been brent,
> Allas! can they nat flee the fyres hete ? " 1.

Such was the Canon's Yeoman's Tale displaying eveil practices of the day, and serving as a violent satire against alchemy and alchemists, according to some. It is representative of much of the superficial and false rampant in this age.

There are some who would have us believe that Chaucer was unhappy in his experiences in love and in his married life, and that he was skeptical towards women, love, and marriage in general. They interpret certain passages as proof of this attitude expressing Chaucer's feeling as personal, resulting from his own experiences. Before anyone believes this he should have justification enough to make certain his opinion. Too many people jump to conclusions without understanding enough to interpret fairly. If Chaucer did give expression to a certain skepticism towards inconstancy of women, and love, and marriage there was enough in his day to inspire it without its being from direct personal experience. To be sure, there are certain places which seem to represent a skeptical attitude towards these questions, despite the various instances when he takes another view. Let us be sure of Chaucer's own opinion before we broadcast it. His Legend of Good Women, of course, perhaps written to make up for unfair treatment of them in other places acknowledges at the same time that he had spoken unfavorably and adversely more than once. Whatever we may say, there are certain passages which may be interpreted as expressing a certain skepticism. Let us look at some instances.

1. Skeat, W.W.: The Student's Chaucer P. 667, Lines 1401-1408

Although Troilus and Criseyde represents the virtue and faithful devotion of Troilus, it expresses unfaithfulness of Criseyde. "And how that she forsook him er she deyde." 1.

"For how Criseyde Troilus forsook," 2.

"But god it wot, er fully monthes two,
She was ful fer fro that entencioun
For bothe Troilus and Troye toun" 3.

In connection with this poem other notes of skepticism are sounded. When Troilus' spirit was freed at his death and went to the heavenly sphere, he gazed at the harmony of heaven, then down upon the little earth where all seemed vanity.

"........and fully gan despyse
This wrecched world, and held al vanitee" 4.

He looked upon those following so eagerly blind pleasures which were ephemeral and temporary, when these people should have been placing their thought on heavenly abiding.

"The blinde lust, the which that may not laste,
And sholden al our herte on hevene caste." 5.

Falseness and instability of the world was bemoaned, and worldly vanity. Chaucer appéaled to youth and maiden to think less of worldly vanity but more of the image of God:

"O yonge fresshe folkes, he or she,
In which that love up groweth with your age,
Repeyreth hoom from worldly vanitee,
And of your herte up-casteth the visage
To thilke god that after his image
Yow made, and thinketh al nis but a fayre
This world, that passeth sone as floures fayre." 6.

He urged love of Him who died on the cross, who never would fail or be false to any friend; whose love was unfailing as earthly friends' was not always.

"And loveth him the wich that right for love
Upon a cros, our soules for to beye,
First starf, and roos, and sit in hevene a-bove;
For he nil falsen no wight, dar I seye,

1,2,3,4,5,6, Skeat, W.W. The Student's Chaucer, P. 207, Line 56; P. 273, Line 15; P. 309, Lines 766-768; P. 324, Lines 1816-1817 P. 324, Lines 1824-1825; P. 324, Lines 1835-1841

"That wol his herte al hooly on him leye.
And sin he best to love is, and most make,
What nedeth feyned loves for to seke ?" 1.

With a tone of skepticism towards the pagans and their cursed old rites and the little their gods were able to avail, Chaucer asked his readers to look at the world's desires with the end reached through hem alone; to look at the guerdon given for toil by Jove, Appollo, Mars and such:

"Lo here, of Payens corsed olde rytes,
Lo here, what alle hir goddes may availle;
Lo here, these wrecched worldes appetytes;
Lo here, the fyn and guerdon for travaile
Of Jove, Appollo, of Mars, of swich rascaille! " 2.

He plead to the true Christ of the cross for mercy uncircumscribed to defend from foes seen and unseen; to make worthy of mercy;

"And to that sothfast Crist, that starf on rode,
With al myn herte of mercy ever I preye;
And to the lord right thus I speke and seye:
Thou oon, and two, and three, eterne on-lyve,
That regnest ay in three and two and oon,
Uncircumscript, and al mayst circumscryve,
Us from visible and invisible foon
Defende; and to thy mercy, everychoon,
So make us, Jesus, for they grace, digne,
For love of mayde and moder thyn benigne! Amen." 3.

Other references were derogatory to faithfulness of women, wives, or marriage. The Merchant, in his Prologue, expressed skepticism towards marriage when he said his wife was quite different from patient Griselda and went on to describe her. He said he knew enough of wailing and sorrow since he had been wedded, although only for two months. He said his wife was not only as bad as the fiend, but more than a match for him; that she was evil and cruel in all things. If only he were free, he never again would enter the snare!

"Were I unbounden, al-so moot I thee!
I wolde never eft comen in the snare." 4.

1,2,3,4, Skeat, W.W. *The Student's Chaucer* P. 324, Lines 1842 1848; P. 325, Lines 1849-1853; P. 325, Lines 1861-1869; P. 612 Lines 1226-1227

He further complained of wedded life:

"We wedded men live in sorwe and care;
Assaye who-so wol, and he shal finde
I seye sooth, by seint Thomas of Inde,
As for the more part, I sey nat alle.
God shilde that it sholde so bifalle! 1.

Whoever had been wifeless could not begin to tell the sorrow that he could of his wife's cursedness:

"A! good sir hoost! I have y-wedded be
This monthes two, and more nat, pardee;
And yet, I trowe, he that all his lyve
Wyflees hath been, though that men wolde him ryve
Un-to the hert, ne coude in no manere
Tellen so muchel sorwe, as I now here
Coude tellen of my wyves cursednesse !

He went on to tell a story of the deceitfulness and falseness of May to January.

"O servant traitour, false hoomly hewe,
Lyk to the naddre in bosom sly untrewe,
God shilde us alle from your aqueyntaunce! " 3.

"O monstre, that so subtilly canst peynte
Thy yiftes, under hewe of stedfastnesse,
That thou deceyvest bothe more and lesse!
Why hastow Januarie thus deceyved," 4.

The story itself shows deceit and foul play all through.

At the close of this Tale, the host himself commented on the wiles of women saying that though his wife tells the truth, she has too many other faults and is a poor one; he is sorry he is tied to her.

"'Now swich a wyf I pray god keep me fro!
Lo, whiche sleightes and subtilitees
In sommen been! for ay as bisy as bees
Ben they, us sely men for to deceyve,
And from a sothe ever wol they seyve: " 5.

" I have a wyf, though that she povre be;
But of hir tonge a labbing shrewe is she,
And yet she hath an heep of vyces mo;" 6

"Me reweth sor I am un-to hir teyd." 7.

Treachery of woman is expressed in the Man of Law's Tale. Throughout the story the treachery of woman was shown and her

1,2,3,4,5,6,7, Skeat, W. W.: The Student's Chaucer P. 612, Lines 122-122-32; P. 612, Lines 1233-1239; P. 619, Line 1785; P. 623 Lines 2062-2065; P. 627, Lines 2420-2424; P. 627, Line 2427; P. 627, Line 2432

falseness and deceit in treatment of her son's wife and child.

> "O serpent under femininitee,
> Lyk to the serpent depe in helle y-bounde,
> Of feyned wom̃an, al that may confounde
> Vertu and innocence, thurgh thy malyce,
> Is bred in thee, as nest of every vyce!" 1.

In connection with this story, woman was spoken of as the nest of sin and the instrument used to beguile.

> "O Satan, envious sin thilke day
> That thou were chased from our heritage,
> Wel knowestow to wommen the olde way!
> Thou madest Eva bringe us in servage.
> Thou wolt fordoon this cristen mariage,
> Thyn instrument so, weylawey the whyle!
> Makestow of wommen, whan thou wolt begyle" 2.

In Lenvoy de Chaucer a Bukton, some defend a skeptical attitude shown through the counsel touching marriage, sent to Bukton. The writer suggested that he would not reveal what he could have revealed at the time, of sorrow and woe of wedlock. He would say that whoever was out of the torment of marriage would never again be bound willingly. If Bukton should wed, the writer told him he would have sorrow and be a slave to his wife:

> "The sorwe and wo that is in mariage," 3.

> "But thilke doted fool that eft hath lever
> Y-cheyned be than out of prisoun crepe
> God lete him never fro his wo dissever,
> Ne no man him bewayle, though he wepe." 4.

> "But thou shalt have sorwe on thy flesh, thy lyf,
> And been thy wyves thral, as seyn these wyse;" 5.

In concluding, the counselor said if safe, not to jeopardize himself; he advised reading the Wife of Bath on the subject, and hoped he would lead a life of freedom rather than slavery:

> "The Wyf of Bathe I pray you that ye rede
> Of this matere that we have on honde,
> God graunte you your lyf frely to lede
> In freedom; for ful hard is to be bonde." 6.

1,2,3,4,5,6, Skeat, W.W. The Student's Chaucer P. 480, Lines 360-364; P. 480, Lines 365-371; P. 124, Line 6; P. 124, Lines 13-16; P. 124, Lines 19-20; P. 125, Lines 29-32

In Against Women Unconstant, skepticism was expressed again. Speaking to woman, this ballade emphasized woman's love of novelty and lack of steadfastness; it indicated lack of fidelity with love of changing and artificiality. Fickleness and vice were stressed and the color intimated as appropriate was not blue for faithfulness, but green for fickleness.

> "I take my leve of your unstefastnesse." 1.
>
> "Ther is no feith that may your herte enbrace;
> But, as a wedercok, that turneth his face
> With every wind, ye fare, and that is sene;
> In stede of blew, thus may ye were al grene." 2.
>
> "Ye might be shryned, for your brotelnesse,
> Bet than Dalyda, Creseide or Candace;
> For ever in chaunging stant your sikernesse,
> That tache may no wight fro your herte arace;
> If ye lese oon, ye can wel tweyn purchace;
> Al light for somer, ye woot wel what I mene,
> In stede of blew, thus may ye were al grene." 3.

The skepticism towards the actions of women was often tied up with other evils of life as pride, envy, avarice, or covetousness. Many of the evils of the time are interwoven and may be classified under more than one head. It was those practices which were based upon the empty, false, superficial in life, and upon ignorance of truth, and which invoked and encouraged supercilious, treacherous defilement,--it was these to which Chaucer was opposed, because they choked freedom of life and development.

So there were notes of skepticism sounded, and notes of warning to those who were living lives of inconstancy and fickleness based upon variable, unstable characteristics.

The Reeve's Tale displayed falseness all through the story in the actions of the miller and his stealing the corn, through his love of gain and covetousness; and falseness and evil on the part of the two young clerks.

1,2,3, Skeat W.W.: The Student's Chaucer P. 127, Line 3; P. 127 Lines 11-14; P. 127, Lines 15-21

"Lo, swich it is a miller to be fals!
And therfore this proverbe is seyd ful sooth,
'Him that nat wene wel that yvel dooth;
A gylour shal him-self bigyled be.'" 1.

In the Man of Law's Tale when the mother came to meet the new daughter-in-law she seemed tender, yet:

"But this scorpioun, this wikked gost,
The sowdanesse, for al hir flateringe,
Caste under this ful mortally to stinge." 2.

There was falseness, wretchedness, drunkenness and treason on the part of the knight who accused her falsely of the slaying of a woman. The King's mother showed falseness when she counterfeited letters and messages of her son's:

"Eft were his lettres stolen everichon
And countrefeted lettres in this wyse:" 3.

In the brief bit of the Cook's Tale we have, there is a picture of one who was a reveler, and rioter, and a thief, as were many in this day. It was a prentice of a guild of victuallers. Blithe he was and comely with black, well-combed locks; he was a fine dancer and merry, was Perkin the Reveler. Amourous gallantry was characteristic of him. He sang and capered at the bridals; he loved a tavern better than a shop. He gathered with him a group of others who liked to dance and sing, to disport and play dice. No other prentice could dice as Perkin, and he was free with his coin in privy resorts. His master found results of this often enough in the accounts; the till was even bare at times. With such a prentice who haunted wenches, and dice, and riotous living, the master suffered for it all in his shop.

"Than Perkin coude, and ther-to he was free
Of hid dispense, in place of privetee.
That fond his maister wel in his chaffare;
For often tyme he fond his box ful bare." 4.

"For sikerly a prentis revelour,
That hunteth dys, riot, or paramour,
His maister shal it in his shoppe abye,
Al have he no part of the minstralcye." 5.

1,2,3,4,5, Skeat W.W.: The Student's Chaucer P. 473, Lines 4318-4321; P. 481, Lines 404-406; P. 486, Lines 792-793; P. 475, Lines 4391-4394

Revelry often turns to theft; revel and fidelity are always at odds:

"For thefte and riot, they ben convertible," 1.

"Revel and trouthe, as in a low degree,
They been ful worthe al day, as men may see." 2.

The jolly prentice was chided morning and night. One day the master decided that it was best to follow the proverb:

"'Wel bet is roten appel out of hord
Than that it rotie al the remenaunt,'" 3.

He thought:

"So fareth it by a riotous servaunt;
It is wel lasse harm to lete him pace,
Than he shende alle the servants in the place." 4.

Better to go than corrupt all the servants. So the master gave him letters of discharge and bade him go with his bad luck.

"And thus this joly prentis hadde his leve.
Now lat him riote al the night or leve." 5.

In the Monk's Prologue the host heartly wished his wife could have heard the story of The Tale of Melibeus,-- she who had no such patience. Her character is portrayed by her actions when her husband beat his boys, when she cried:

"..........'slee the dogges everichoon,
And brek hem, bothe bak and every boon.'" 6.

In the Monk's Tale, the story of Samson was an example of one who lost strength and hardihood through falseness and treachery.

"His false wyf coude him so plese and preye
Til she his conseil knew, and she untrewe
Un-to his foos his conseil gan biwreye,
And him forsook, and took another newe," 7.

O noble mighty Samson, who, if he had not told his secret to his wife, would have found his match no-where in the world.

"O noble almighty Sampson, leef and dere,
Had thou nat told to wommen thy secree,
In al this worlde ne hadde been thy pere!" 8.

1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8, Skeat, W.W.: The Student's Chaucer P. 475, Line 4395; P. 475, Lines 4397-4398; P. 475, Lines 4406-4407; P. 475 Lines 4408-4410; P. 475, Lines 4413-4414; P. 530, Lines 3089-3090; P. 532, Lines 3217-3220; P. 532, Lines 3242-3244

For twenty years had Samson governed over Israel. But

"But sone shal he wepen many a tere;
For wommen shal him bringen to meschaunce!" 1.

Because:
"Un-to his lemman Dalida he tolde
That in his heres al his strength lay," 2.

Whereupon she:
"..falsly to his fo-men she him solde.
And sleping in hir barme up-on a day
She made to clippe or shere his heer awey,
And made his fo-men al his craft espyen;
And whan that they him fonde in this array,
They bounde him faste, and putten out his yen." 3.

Be warned by this old example:

"That no men telle hir conseil til hir wyves
Of swich thing as they wolde han secree fayn,
If that it touche hir limmes or hir lyves." 4.

In the story of Nebuchadnezzar was an example of one who paid much attention to worldly things. Here was a king of majesty, glory and power. He made eunuchs and thralls of fair children of royal blood of Israel. The proud king had a golden statue formed to which he commanded all to pay veneration and to bow, or else be burned. This king, who thought only of worldly pleasure and position, felt himself as high as God who he thought could not bereave him of his high station. But one day he lost his majesty and was only like a beast till God released him and gave his wit back, whereupon he thanked God and respected His might and grace.

"This king of kinges proud was and elaat,
He wende that god, that sit in magestee,
Ne mighte him nat bireve of his estaat:
But sodeynly he loste his dignitee,
And lyk a beste him semed for to be,
And eet hay as an oxe, and lay ther-oute;
In reyn with wilde bestes walked he,
Til certein tyme was y-come aboute." 5.

As an example of one who lived an evil, proud, and wicked life, and retribution for this, the story of Nero was cited. His pride

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1,2,3,4,5, Skeat, W.W.: The Student's Chaucer P. 532, Lines 3251-3252; P. 532, Lines 3253-3254; P. 532, Lines 3255-3260; P. 532 Lines 3282-3284; P. 533, Lines 3357-3364

was great; he it was who had the world in subjection. His dress was bedecked with jewels for in gems he delighted. Nor was there emperor more proud or sumptuous of array. He was cruel. In his youth, vice and tyranny were kept from him longer because of his master who was intelligent and gentle. This master chided Nero for his vices.

"More delicat, more pompous of array,
More proud was never emperour than he;
That ilke cloth, that he had wered o day,
After that tyme he nolde it never see.
Nettes of gold-thred hadde he gret plentee
To fisshe in Tybre, whan him liste pleye.
His lustes were al lowe in his decree,
For fortune as his freend him wolde obeye." 1.

"'Sir,' wolde he seyn, 'an emperour moot nede
Be vertuous, and hate tirannye'--" 2.

Whereupon Nero made his master die. But this man of high degree and vice was to be dragged from his seat. One night the people rose against him for his wickedness:

"The peple roos up-on him on a night
For his defaute, and whan he it espyed,
Out of his dores anon he hath him dight
Alone, and, ther he wende han ben allyed,
He knokked faste, and ay, the more he cryed,
The faster shette they the dores alle;
Tho wiste he wel he hadde him-self misgyed,
And wente his wey, no lenger dorste he calle." 3.

The people shouted so he heard:

"The peple cryde and rombled up and doun,
That with his eres herde he how they seyde,
'wher is this false tyraunt, this Neroun?'
For fere almost out of his wit he breyde,
And to his Goddes pitously he preyde
For socour, but it mighte nat bityde,
For drede of this, him thoughte that de deyde,
And ran in-to a gardin, him to hyde." 4.

Such was the end of evil.

We have, too, the story of Holofernes who held much in subjection and was mighty and of great renown, and magnificence, and

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1,2,3,4, Skeat, W.W.: The Student's Chaucer P. 538, Lines 3661-3668; P. 538, Lines 3697-3698; P. 538, Lines 3717-3724; P. 538 Lines 3725-3732

arrogance. Men held him in awe. But to this one who held so highly earthly might, his pomp and power was to be lost, when a woman smote him:

"And yit, for al his pompe and al his might,
Judith, a womman, as he lay upright,
Sleping, his heed of smoot, and from his tente
Ful prively she stal from every wight,
And with his heed unto hir toun she wente." 1.

The lofty pride and evil works of King Antiochus and his hatred and torment was awful. He would not turn from his cursed purpose.

But "God daunted al his pryde and al his bost.
For he so sore fil out of his char,
That it his limes and his skin to-tar
So that he neither mighte go ne ryde,
But in a chayer men about him bar,
Al for-brused, bothe bak and syde." 2.

He was smote so that:

"..thurgh his body wikked wormes crepte;" 3.

He received the guerdon due his arrogance.

In the Parson's Tale, skepticism is shown as the speaker mentions the evils and sins which were rampant in this century, and tries to discourage them. In this tale the Parson struck against pride especially as engendering other evils such as disobedience, hypocrisy, scorn, arrogance, strife, irreverence, pertinaciousness, and vain glory. It was felt that there was sin in the realm of attire, and skepticism of the present conditions was expressed. There was among certain people over-emphasis of its costliness and cut and elaboration; it was blamed by the parson for its superfluity, and inordinate scantiness:

"Allas! may men nat seen, as in oure dayes,
the sinful costlewe array of clothinge, and
namely in to muche superfluitee, or elles in
to desordinat scantnesse ? " 4.

1,2,3,4, Skeat, W.W.: The Student's Chaucer P. 539, Lines 3360-3764; P. 539, Line 3799-3804; P. 439, Line 3306; P. 688, Lines 412-415

In connection with the superfluity which made attire so harmful to the people, there was cost of embroidering and trimming, with waste of cloth for the sake of vanity:

> "As to the firste sinne, that is in superfluitee of clothinge, which that maketh it so dere, to harm of the people; nat only the cost of embroudinge, the degyse endentinge or barringe, oundinge, palinge, windinge, or bendinge, and semblable wast of cloth in vanitee;" 1.

There was costly furring and slitting, and excessive length which wasted, and hindered giving to the poor, causing great loss. The more cloth was wasted, the more it cost some people for scarcity of it; furthermore, if such clothing had been given, punched and slit, to poor people, it would not have been fitting for them or their necessity of protection from inclemency:

> "The more that clooth is wasted, the more it costeth to the people for the scantnesse; and forther-over if so be that they wolde yeven swich pounsoned and dagged clothing to the povre folk, it is nat convenient to were for hir estaat, ne suffisant to bete hir necessitee, to kep hem fro the distemperance of the firmament." 2.

On the other hand, there were those who enjoyed horrible short-cut jackets showing too much of their persons, and striped hose:

> "Upon that other syde, to speken of the horrible disordinat scantnesse of clothing; as been thise shortnesse ne covere nat the shameful members of man, to wikked entente." 3.

> "And if so be that they departen hire hoses in othere colours, as in whyt and blak, or whyt and blew, or blak and reed, and so forth; thanne semeth it, as by variance of colour, that half the partie

1,2,3, Skeat, W.W.: The Student's Chaucer P. 688, Lines 416-417; P. 688, Lines 420-421; P. 688, Line 422

> of hir privee membres were corrupt by the fyr
> of seint Antony, or by cancre, or by other swich
> meschaunce." 1.

As to the exorbitant array of women, through the visages of some they seemed chaste and meek yet gave notice of wantonness and pride through their great array of attire. Not seemliness was said to be unfitting but that superfluity or else inordinate scantiness of clothing that needed reproach:

> "Now as of the outrageous array of wommen,
> god woot, that though the visages of somme
> of hem seme ful chaast and debonaire, yet
> notifie they in hir array of atyr likerousnesse and pryde. I sey nat that honestete in
> clothinge of man or womman is uncovenable, but
> certes the superfluitee or disordinat scantitee
> of clothinge is reprevable." 2.

Words were spoken also against sin in excess in over-adornment in regard to equipage or riding:

> "Also, the sinne of adornement or of apparaille
> is in thinges that apertenen to rydinge, as in
> to manye delicate horses that been holden for
> delyt, that been so faire, fatte, and costlewe;" 3.

And because of this sin, there was the keeping of too many vicious serving-men:

> "and also to many a vicious knave that is sustened
> by cause of hem." 4.

The curious equipment stressed elaborate saddles, precious cloth, and trimming of gold and silver.

> "in to curous harneys as in sadeles, in
> crouperes, peytrels, and brydles covered
> with precious clothing and riche barres
> and plates of gold and of silver." 5.

God himself said of such, he would confound the riders of such horses. These folks took too little heed of the riding of the Son of God and his equipage who rode upon an ass with no courtly equipment:

1,2,3,4,5, Skeat, W.W.: The Student's Chaucer P. 688, Lines 426-427; P. 689, Lines 430-431; P. 689, Line 432; P. 689, Line 433

> "This folk taken litel reward of the rydinge of goddes sone of hevene, and of his harneys when he rood up-on the asse, and ne hadde noon other harneys but the povre clothes of hise disciples; ne we ne rede nat that evere he rood on other beest." 1.

The writer also expressed a skeptical attitude towards those whose pride was to excess in keeping great households, and the household felonious and baneful to people, and the inhabitants insolent in high leadership;

> "For certes, swiche lordes sellen thanne hir lordshipe to the devel of helle, whanne they sustenen the wikkednesse of hir meinee. Or elles whan this folk of lowe degree, as thilke that holden hostelries, sustenen the thefte of hir hostilers, and that is in many manere of deceites." 2.

Such were said to be flies seeking honey or hounds seeking the carrion; they strangled spiritually for the sake of dominion, about whom David the prophet said:

> "'wikked deeth mote come up-on thilke lordshipes, and god yeve that they mote descenden in-to helle al doun; for in hir houses been iniquitees and shrewednesses, 'and nat god of hevene." 3.

Unless they amend:

> "right so god wol yeve his malison to swiche lorkshipes as sustenen the wikkednesse of hir servaunts," 4.

Pride was rebuked in connection with the table and its fruit, for here rich men were bidden to feasts and poor rebuked. There was also excess of eating and drinking:

> "Pryde of the table appereth eek ful ofte; for certes, riche men been cleped to festes, and povre folk been put awey and rebuked." 5.

> "Also in excesse of diverse metes and drinkes; and namely, swiche manere bake metes and dish-metes, brenninge of wilde fyr, and peynted and castelled with papir, and semblable wast; so that it is abusion for to thinke." 6.

1,2,3,4,5,6, Skeat, W.W.: The Student's Chaucer P. 689, Line 435 P. 689, Lines 439-440: P. 689, Lines 442; P. 689, Line 443 P. 689, Line 444; P. 689, Line 445

And by preciousness of vessels and curiosity of minstrelsy man was more incited to wanton pleasures and:

> "if so be that he sette his herte and lasse
> up-on oure lord Jesu Crist, certein it is
> a sinne; and certeinly the delyces mighte
> been so grete in this caas, that man mighte
> lightly falle by hem in-to deedly sinne." 1.

In the story of the Nun's Priest's Tale, it was a fox who, sly and unrighteous lay quietly hiding, waiting his time to fall upon Chanticleer. False one, lurking in his lair,--a new Iscariot, a false dissimulator:

> "A col-fox, ful of sly iniquitee," 2.
>
> "And in a bed of wortes stille he lay,
> Til it was passed undern of the day,
> Wayting his tyme on Chauntecleer to falle,
> As gladly doon thise homicydes alle,
> That in awayt liggen to mordre men.
> O false mordrer, lurking in they den!
> O new Scariot, newe Genilon!
> False dissimilour, O Greek Sinon,
> That broghtest Troye al outrely to sorwe! " 3.

We know that there were men sly as foxes, false hypocrites alive carrying on their nefarious schemes through flattery and good speaking as this fox was to try to do. When Chanticleer spied the enemy, he started to flee, but even the fox, as did those in Chaucer's age, tried wickedness under the assumption of virtue; he tried flattery. He said something like this: "Alas, afraid of me, your friend? I would be a fiend if I desired harm to you. I came not for evil intent but, truly, to hear your sweet voice sing--it is wonderful. " Upon more flattery, Chanticleer tried to sing so loud and well that he shut his eyes in the attempt. Using still more flattery the fox appealed again and Chanticleer, ravished by such words, failed to see the fraud. Alas, what falseness!

> "Allas! ye lordes, many a fals flatour
> Is in your courtes, and many a losengeour,

1,2,3, Skeat, W.W.: *The Student's Chaucer* P. 689, Line 447; P. 548, Line 4405; P. 548, Lines 4411-4419

That plesen yow wel more, by my feith,
Than he that soothfastnesse unto yow seith.
Redeth Ecclesiaste of flaterye;
Beth war, ye lordes, of hir trecherye." 1.

So Chanticleer, while his thoughts were centered on his own praise, was borne away. Whereupon, the arrogance of the fox, in turn, was treated. For Chanticleer appealed to the pride of his captor to rebuke those following and show his own power.

"A verray pestilence up-on yow falle! " 2.

He opened his mouth to talk and Chanticleer flew up into a tree where he beshrew both if beguiled more and said:

"Thou shalt na-more thrugh thy flaterye,
Do me to singe and winke with myn ye.
For he that winketh, whan he sholde see,
Al wilfully, god lat him never thee!" 3.

And the author said:

"Lo, swich it is for to be recchelees,
And necligent, and truste on flaterye.
But ye that holden this tale a folye,
As of a fox, or of a cok and hen,
Taketh the moralitee, good men." 4.

Falseness in The Hous of Fame was expressed when the writer, reminded by Eneas and Dido said:

"Lo, how a woman doth amis,
To love him that unknowen is!
For, by Crist, lo! thus hit fareth;
'Hit is not al gold, that glareth.'
For, al-so brouke I wel myn heed,
Ther may be under goodliheed
Kevered many a shrewed vyce;
Therfor be no wight so nyce,
To take a love only for chere,
For speche, for frendly manere;
For this shal every woman finde
That som man, of his pure kinde
Wol shewen outward the faireste,
Til he have caught that what his leste;
And thanne wol he causes finde,
And swere how that she is unkinde,
Or fals, or prevy, or double was." 5.

All that shines is not gold. In this age especially cursedness often appeared under the covering of goodness; outward appearance

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1,2,3,4,5, Skeat, W.W.: The Student's Chaucer P. 549, Lines 4515-4520; P. 550, Line 4600; P. 550, Lines 4619-4622; P. 550, Lines 4626-4630; P. 329, Lines 269-285

was not always true. Men had goodness in speech, yet no truth. Alas! all was deception.

" O have ye men swich goodliheed
In speche, and never a deel of trouthe?
Allas, that ever hadde routhe
Any woman on any man!
Now see I wel, and telle can,
We wrecched wimmen conne no art;
For certeyn, for the more part,
Thus we be served everichone
How sore that ye men conne grone,
Anoon, as we have yow receyved,
Certainly we ben deceyved;
For, though your love laste a sesoun,
Wayte upon the conclusion,
And eek how that ye determynen,
And for the more part diffynen." 1.

Falseness was expressed through the recollection and reminder of men's faithlessness:

" Lo, Demophon, duk of Athenis,
How he forswor him ful falsly
And trayed Phillis wikkedly," 2.

And how false was another to several:

" Was to Briseida Achilles,
And Paris to Oenone;
And Jason to Medea;
And Ercules to Dyanira;
For he lefte hir for Iole," 3.

And how false was Theseus:

" How fals eek was he, Theseus;
That, as the story telleth us,
How he betrayed Adriane;
The devel be his soules bane!" 4.

" And he made hir a ful fals jape;" 5.

Again, Chaucer cried:

" Allas, allas! now may men wepe and crye!
For in our dayes nis but covetyse
(And) doublenesse, and treasoun and envye,
Poysoun, manslaughtre, and mordre in sondry wyse." 6.

And again, of lust, the foul sin, he spoke. He said that it not only enfeebled the mind of man but ruined his body too. The end of the deed and blind desires would be only lamentation.

1,2,3,4,5,6. Skeat, W.W.: The Student's Chaucer P. 329, Lines 330-344; P. 330, Lines 388-390; P. 330; Lines 397-403; P. 330, Lines 405-408; P. 330, Line 414, P. 119, Lines 61-64

"O foule lust of luxurie! lo, thyn ende'
Nat only that thou feyntest mannes minde,
But verraily thou wolt his body shende;
Th'ende of thy werk or of thy lustes blinde
Is compleying, how many-oon may men finde
That moght for werk som-tyme, but for th'entente
To doon this sinne, ben outher sleyn or shente! " 1.

Thus we see definite expression through Chaucer's work of skepticism towards that which was narrowing and limiting in the old traditional regime, or in the present superficiality of his age; towards that which, with all the ignorance and superstition hanging over, was evil and false, and led to the emphasis of covetousness and short-sighted aims in life. It was because Chaucer was in favor of Truth with its knowledge for the individual, and the larger freedom made possible, that he overthrew conventional practices for the recognition of Truth instead of hypocrisy. Change was in the air. The old was to break, and the new to reign.

In addition to definite skepticism expressed by Chaucer through his work, there are certain characteristics of his and phases of his writing we should consider which are in a sense largely a result of his own daring originality plus the new influence strengthening in his century; it was the latter which made possible the greatest use of his genius. Many new thoughts and impulses replenished and broadened Chaucer's life and found expression in his literary work. Some of them were shown in situations set forth in his work and in his treatment of situations, whether traditional in source or not. For he could use material conventional in source, yet treat and handle it in such a way he infused a something new and original in it,--something far in advance beyond the conventional treatment. There are characteristics of his which make his work point not to the medieval, but to the modern; there is an intangible something which distinguishes him in his tastes

1. Skeat, W.W.: The Student's Chaucer P. 488, Lines 925-931

and his work. "By his origin, his education, his tastes, his manner of life, as well as by his writings, Chaucer represents the new age; he paints it from nature, and is a part of it." 1. He did refuse to stay under the control of merely the traditional; he believed in and encouraged the new. It is in considering this phase that we are at the same time emphasizing his newness, which itself marked him as a man of the modern world.

We are to remember that while Chacuer did actually borrow other material some of which was quite conventional, there was, even so, an intangible new spirit, which shone forth in all his works, growing stronger as he denounced more and more French or Italian material itself, as such, and as he renounced conventions or narrowness, turning to his own English people, and growing in his own powers and freedom. No matter what Chaucer borrowed, an idea, a line, a comparison, or even somewhat lengthy translations rather closely followed, a plot, or general inspiration of a tale, he used it in his own way and made it his own. He was not a mere imitator or copier. With the growth of the new spirit, he took in the very essence and let it arouse his talents and possibilities to new power. For the sake of clearness, some like to think of a systematic division of Chaucer's poetical activity. Such a classification is sometimes referred to as including the French, Italian, and English periods of his life and work. But it has been objected to because it seems to obscure Chaucer's career somewhat, and to be easily misunderstood as narrowing it. His career was cumulative. He did not forget French when he studied Italian, nor did he neglect lessons learned in Italy when living in his English period. In fact the adjectives applied to various

1. Jusserand, J.J.: A Literary History of the English People P.267

periods sometimes confuse--it was not that Chaucer was under domination of one or another, especially as time went on. To be sure, he was influenced largely by the French in his French period which was natural, since he was surrounded by these influences and forces. But in the Italian period, though he was moved greatly by certain famous men outstanding in the coming Renaissance, he was not the disciple of any one. It was not that Dante and Petrarch controlled him, but that they were his emancipators; they enlarged him and awoke him to consciousness of a power that was his own. Boccaccio, too, stirred him especially to emulation. But, of course, Chacuer did not forget all he had learned from the French--he retained it when it was of value. The second period is not Italian in the same sense that the first is French--it is a time of more originality. Chaucer's powers were rising to a greater height--he was breaking through and over old boundaries and limitations to greater originality and freedom; he was coming to appreciate his powers and possibilities more than before, although their full scope was to be seen still further in the future. With the third, the English Period, we have still another change in the application. It was not English because the poet was moved only by English fashions, or emancipated by English writers, but because his genius turned to English life and character. Thus his French period is French in a sense in which it is not Italian in his second, nor English in his third. It is true that in discussing his works as his life wore on, we find expression more and more of a skepticism in the overthrow of the old, and a refusal to be narrowly limited; in the emphasis of his originality coupled with a great force expanding in his time--a new spirit towards freedom. But, even earlier in Chaucer's

life when influenced more by precedent and convention than he was later, even before he expanded so much, Chancer was himself to some extent.

It is not for us to draw a line between one period or another, but rather to grasp a large view of Chaucer as shown through his life, and to realize that he took in the best of all influences present, and brought to bear with his own genius the best he had gained, with a spirit all his own, and an effective interweaving of all his knowledge and originality and power, and the growing newness which enabled him to develop new forms and spirit. It is a large appreciation we desire of Chaucer and his reception of the new as against the precedented only. There are, to be sure, definite poems which bear impress rather clearly of the result of his contact with the spirit which was stirring Italy when he went there, and which was to stir more than Italy. One poem may have a reproduction of the triple rhyme of Dante's Divine Comedy; another may have been translated in part from Boccaccio, or another, A different one, Troilus and Criseyde, may have been based upon Boccaccio's Filostrato. The unfinished Hous of Fame may show Dante's influence. And in Chaucer's crowning work, The Canterbury Tales we are told there may be something of Italian influence in the source of some of his tales, or in his plan. However, the important thought for us to remember in considering his skepticism is that he did not stop with the aid of borrowings of situation or material,--he went beyond; he made a style of his own and breathed his own spirit into everything, especially his great Canterbury Tales. In the Lyf of Seinte Cecile, a passage may have been borrowed from Dante's Paradiso; this poet was also quoted in The Parlement of Foules where there was a paraphrase. Anelida and Arcite contained several stanzas taken from this same original. The idea of the Legend of Good

Women may have been borrowed from Boccaccio's work. Some of the journeys to the spirit-world of Dante's work served somewhat as models for the Hous of Fame.

Let us look at work of Chaucer which brings out his greatness, especially his originality and creative power, and his daring in going beyond old-time-tradition of material, and manner of handling, and spirit. In The Book of the Duchesse, the poem in which Chaucer celebrated the excellencies and depicted the sorrows of the wife of Prince John, a multitude of ideas appeared for the first time in English dress; remininscences from classical antiquity or the Old Testament, long spun-out allegories, witty touches from wisdom of schoolmen. Frequently, in spite of all the language parenthetically intruduced, the voice of real passion was heard; and in some passages of the knight's discourse as in his invectives or complaints, in antithetic form, the student of Shakespeare might be reminded of earlier works of even so great a writer. There are certain points of freshness and charm. It may be seen that the young artist has all the traits of ideal womanhood vivid in his soul, although his hand is not yet practiced enough to copy the image. From what he does succeed in saying we see the refined and aesthetic moral sense of the poet.

Early in this Book of the Duchesse, Chaucer's dramatic tendency may be seen. He makes the dialogue become a dramatic scene; like a true dramatist he sees before him the speakers vividly, keeping in mind even the facial expression which accompanies every word they utter. "That which we see developed into the highest art in his later poems is thus present in germ in this work of his youth."[1]

There is the series of pictures, the bright May morning, awaking in a chamber with beautifully painted windows, sweet singing of birds, the exciting picture of the hunt with the description

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1. Ten Brink, Bernard: History of English Literature P.44

of breezy freshness of the forest,--in these, although there are reminiscences and even borrowings from the Romance of the Rose and similar poems, they are closely interwoven with the poet's own vivid ideas and his expressions of a deep sympathy with nature. We must say that in the Prologue the principal motives seem to have been borrowed by Chaucer from a French poet and that the influence of this poet was clearly traceable through the whole poem. "But even in the Prologue, where this influence is most evident, what Chaucer borrows he makes really his own, and brings it into a new connection, suited to the higher purposes of his own poetry."[1] There were certain peculiarities which distinguished him as a story-teller which are already seen in this piece, as his elaboration of principal events and passing over, hurriedly, other things.

In a sense the conception and execution of the Book of the Duchesse are no masterpiece; in both, Chaucer is an imitator of French poetry of the period. "But the plan, within the conventional bounds and inspite of all imitations, nevertheless manifests a decided originality, (and although numerous portions of the story depend on a free and happy imitation there is very much that is highly significant and drawn from personal experience). In this work an effort is made to say more than the poets of that age were accustomed to say--an effort to produce effects which no Englishman had yet attempted. Strange methods show his style and taste was not of course fully developed. The language itself is simple and expressive, although at times greatly overcharged. Often he transgressed proper limits in length of his episodes and in repetitions. Though he wrote in the traditional form of

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[1] Ten Brink, Bernard: History of English Literature P.45

short-rhymed couplet, by frequent use of enjambement (beginning the sense in one line and completing it in the next) he removes the chief defect of this kind of verse, and often brings out its characteristic excellences in spirited and lively manner. He distinguishes himself, even in this poem from most of his contemporaries by the purity of his sonorous rhymes."[1]

In the Compleynte to Pity, we have probably the earliest extant poem of Chaucer's in which a certain stanza appears which did occur before Chaucer's time, so was not invented by Chaucer, but was used with such partiality by Chaucer and turned to such artistic account and handled so consistently in the disposition of his verse that it may be considered as his own, and is rightfully called by his name. Although the idea of the poem is clothed in ordinary style of the allegorical school, the deeply affected feelings of the past break through the conventional dress repeatedly. Though there are some abstractions, pleasant harmony of word, and verse, and sense, and energy is not clogged. When compared to The Book of the Duchesse, there is a decided advance in the command of form. And in the more artistic construction of the new verse and sonorous stanzas there is seen the poet's sense of elegance of diction quickened.

In The Life of Seinte Cecile, the form raises Chaucer far above his predecessors. Though the individuality of the poet is kept back in the legend itself, it is so much more pronounced in the Introduction.

In the A.B.C., Chaucer changes the original stanza to a more dignified and serious form. Although it is fresh in conception, it does have the appearance of an intentional work or art. It gives an opportunity to admire Chaucer's great mastery in management of language, verse and stanza.

1. Ten Brink, Bernard: The History of English Literature P.46

If one turns from Boccaccio's Teseide to Chaucer's Knight's Tale (later revised possibly for The Canterbury Tales), the difference is said to be so great he feels he turns from a "world of impossibilities to a world, if not of realities, at least of inner truth."[1] Chaucer's story has the atmosphere of a romantic tale and the action of the personages participating belongs to a world of a uniform poetic impress--that "of a fantastic period of the Renaissance. This uniformity lies in the soul of the poet whose many-sided education is concentrated in living interest for what is thoroughly human, and in an increasing perception of the beautiful."[2] Chaucer's characters are more realistic and "in the way they express their feelings the poet's own sovereign humor is frequently revealed."[3] In Chaucer, Theseus is not seen fighting for power or glory for its own sake, but is only engaged in interests of humanity. "Nor does he (Theseus) stand on the conventional ideal dignity or in the narrow limits of his Italian prototype; like an English knight of the fourteenth century, he can fly into a passion with great violence. But under a somewhat rude exterior he conceals an excellent heart and sturdy manhood, sound common sense and noble humanity."[4] Chaucer bestowed great care on some descriptive parts of the poem. The English poet differs from his predecessor in a remarkable way especially in the delineation of the amphitheater built by Theseus for the tournament with its three temples for Mars, Venus, and Diana. " The description of the three temples and the pictures or statues therein contained shows us on the one hand excellent models of characteristic amplification, and on the other hand passages

1. Ten Brink, Bernard; The History of English Literature P. 68
2. Ten Brink, Bernard; The History of English Literature P. 68
3. Ten Brink, Bernaard; The History of English Literature P. 69
4. Ten Brink, Bernard; The History of English Literature P. 70

which betray the influence of the Renaissance in its growing taste for plastic beauty."[1]

In The Romance of the Rose, at Chaucer's stage of development, he must have translated this work in a way peculiarly his own; he probably softened if not eliminated incongruity in treatment and tone between the two parts.

In The Parlement of Foules, we have charming beauty full of life and true to nature toned down in conception and coloring exquisitely, and full of dramatic movement in its climax, and enhanced with richest humor. "Chaucer is here thoroughly himself; the subject treated is comparatively insignificant; but he does it the fullest justice. What does it matter if the description of the park and the temple of Venus have been largely translated from Boccaccio, or if the image of nature and some characteristic traits in the various kinds of birds have been taken from a medieval Latin author or if other points remind us of Dante? The life that animates all this little world has been breathed into it by Chaucer who was himself a pupil of the great teacher Nature, the Vicar of Almighty God."[2] Chaucer's feeling for Nature comes to a full expression; his genius for characterization and humor appear in a new light. His language and stanzas roll on in rich cadences.

But it is in his poem, Troilus and Criseyde that we find almost a different Chaucer because of his development and power. Heretofore his writings even though superior to those of his English or French contemporaries, were of a similar kind. But in this poem, now, he is far more powerful and complete; he surpasses even the Italians by whom he had been moved, and writes this great poem. Troilus had been treated variously by others

[1] Ten Brink, Bernard: The History of English Literature P. 71
[2] Ten Brink, Bernard: The History of English Literature P. 83

preceding Chaucer, including Boccaccio who developed the story over that which had gone before and added characters and made a romance of it. Chaucer appropriates the plot, transforms the characters, alters even the tone of the story, breaks the monotony, introduces changes and additions in age and disposition and conditions, moulds in his own unique way the material he borrows like one who dares to be himself; to judge and to criticize, and to surpass preceding writers; this he distinctly does. It is the literary progress marked by this work that is astonishing. In the peom there is something of a fusion of the Celt's dramatic sense, the Latin race's care for form, the Norman's observing attitude, and the Saxon's tenderness. This work, semi-epic in form, is connected both with the art of the novel and also the art of the drama, which England was to contribute to in its development.

In Troilus we have an astonishing performance of re-creating the Italian epic of Boccaccio into a new and deeper and richer poem. The tragical element in Boccaccio's poem seemed to attract Chaucer most; he changed the characters of the two lovers. The English Criseyde is more innocent, less experienced, less sensual, and more modest than the Italian prototype. But in Pandarus is the creative power of Chaucer shown most strongly. It is a work of such intellectual boldness and assurance as was equalled only in the productions of the greatest masters. Pandarus helps to develop the dramatic life of the action. Chaucer perceived the dramatic possibilities, and his genius made it possible to bring them to light. Almost all the changes, transpositions or interpolations made tend in this direction. It is mostly in the dramatic scenes that the characters are evolved and situations developed. There is a truthfulness in conception, a delicacy of motives, a well-planned arrangement of the whole piece, and abundance of diversified ideas and situations; the pliancy of language

which does justice to every thought. There is a broad and smoothly flowing stanza responsive to even a shade of feeling. This developed an art compared with which the doings of most of his contemporaries appear childlike. It "enables us to appreciate how much Chaucer owes to the Italian Renaissance, of which he may be called the first English pupil...........as poet."[1.]

The Hous of Fame is one of the first poems in which Chaucer's originality shows forth clearly, in spite of reminiscences of ancient authors and the frequent allusions and quotations. Here there are suggestions of the power of Troilus and Criseyde, and of the kindly judgment with which the poet expresses himself even in his Canterbury Tales. He suggests the modern, too, in the charming way in which he hints of himself--his vigils in the tower, his night of writing, his reading till his eyes waxed dim. In The Hous of Fame, Chaucer presents a process of mental liberation with bright humor and elegant art, and accomplishes his own liberation. There were reminiscences of varied authors, especially Dante. The period of Italian influence was followed by a period of an old classical character; Chaucer was spurred by the Italian masters to a more intensive study of Roman models. The Hous of Fame was symbolical of this relation going back to Virgil's world, though started under influence of the Divine Comedy.

In the Latin models the poet preserves his independence as much as when he was drawing from Boccaccio or Dante. He borrows directly and takes many passages wholesale into his own language. "But he is nowhere untrue to his own style, and in no place does he forget the plan and character of his own work."[2.] According to the material before him and his purpose, he makes either simple

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1. Ten Brink, Bernard: The History of English Literature P.96
2. Ten Brink, Bernard: The History of English Literature P.113

or greater changes in characters, detail of action, the story, or in shortening, summarizing, enlarging, or supplementing. He sometimes weakens motives or lets them go altogether in order to strengthen others, or intruduces absolutely new ones. He sometimes brings together featuresfor a story from various other sources. By his own tone and color he brings his characters and subjects nearer his own time and people, and gives them a local tinge. "The mythological machinery appears reduced to a minimum, is handled with a certain skepticism, or sometimes completely suppressed."[1] ...."Not being narrowed in by any classical etiquette, and not being bound down....by the tradition of any naive popular superstition, Chaucer does not allow himself, in the smallest degree, to be overawed by the sonacious names of the antique heroes and demi-gods...."[1]

In the Legend of Dido, we see "a talent that can select with sure tact, can condense cleverly, and has the gift of fresh description with an independent execution of the details and individual management of the characters."[2] In Hypsipyle and Medea, in a section where Jason gains favor, " a passage which according to all appearances depends on the free invention of the poet and introduces a piece of delightful comic intrigue into the tragic action."[2] In the Legend of Phyllis, there is shown "the art of building up and supplementing a story from hints previously gathered, though it suffers in narrative portion and dry condensation."[2]

The real importance of The Legend of Good Women was that is was a study in a new field for Chaucer, and a style he had so far little cultivated. He had written few such short tales and practically always as episodes only in greater works of a different nature."He here made his first attempt in that domain of cyclic

[1] Ten Brink, Bernard: The History of English Literature P.113
[2] Ten Brink, Bernard: The History of English Literature P. 115

story-telling in which he was afterwards to gain his fadeless laurels. And here for the first time he employed the metrical form which holds such a happy mean between the chatty tone of the short rhymed couplet and the lyrical ring of the strophe;viz., the rhymed couplet of ten syllables which was raised by him to the classical metre of the poetic romance, and which, under the name of the heroic couplet, was the most extensively employed in later English poetry."[1.]

The Wife of Bath is thoroughly English in character. All the weaknesses that satirists have charged against woman are supplemented and condensed by the poet, and found here vividly portrayed in concrete and typical form. She unfolds her picture with a flippant ease and delightful mixture of ingenuousness and impudence with wit, and begins with great indignation to quote woman-haters. Chaucer's ease and fullness of detail is present; there is knowledge of mankind and comic power shown in the poem; vivid truthfulness and clear presentation of the story."The Wife of Bath belongs to universal literature as one of its indestructible types"[2]..

It is said that of January and May, the source is not known. It may be from an Italian story or French, "but in any case he has unmistakably impressed the stamp of his own originality in the details of the execution, in the characterization of the motives."[2.] In January and May, he turned to a species in which he had great strength, "the highly seasoned realistic comic romance, of which the most successful examples then written were the works of the French trouvères and Boccaccio's Decameron. But Chaucer drives all his predecessors completely out of the field. His very first attempt is a masterpiece of the highest kind. The interest is well sustained; light and shade are inter-

1. Ten Brink, Bernard: The History of English Literature P. 116
2. Ten Brink, Beranrd: The History of English Literature P.130

spersed with a master hand; retarding elements are brought in with great effect to heighten the suspense; the characters and situations are presented with the distinctness of the drama, and the whole story breathes a cheerful objectivity a naìve sensuality and sly humor, united to a refined culture and highly developed art."[1.]

Now, as to Chaucer's masterpiece, his Canterbury Tales. This picture of the life of his century, taken right from life, was written at a time when he was most himself and not anyone else,--when he threw over much of convention. His very presentation of such a picture of life with its appreciation of this world and its pleasures is not medieval, but points in advance. A broad view of life and rich resources and great variety were hovering before Chaucer's mind when he wrote this great poem. The individuality of the poet and his genius of his nation asserted itself in contrast to the Italian, as in Palamon and Arcite, and Troilus; only now, with greater energy and power than it could previously because of greater ripeness of culture.

Chaucer's whole thinking and writing had taken on a more decidedly national tinge as he grew in age and larger experience of life. After French, Italian, and Latin poetry, now he was more interested than before in productions of English partly from ethical and patriotic motives and aesthetical grounds; interested in satires, romantic poems, or popular songs. "He watched political events with deepest interest and particularly movements in social and ecclesiastical affairs, and intellectual currents of his time. His sympathy with Wycliffism and with the great re-

[1.] Ten Brink, Bernard: The History of English Literature P. 130

former himself, had subsequently become more significant...... ...he remained what he had been--a good Catholic, with...attacks of skepticism; a worldling with deep though often dominant religious feelings. But the moral greatness of the reformer and his pure zeal for the Christian life and doctrine which was still working in many of his followers, inspired Chaucer with the greatest respect and quickened his perception of the abuses and the moral sores in the church and society." 1.

Chaucer's plan combined advantages of the Decameron, and added characteristics in which that poem was deficient. His action had a definite object in view, and gave an opportunity for more variety and delightful episodes. It, too, offered and demanded familiar intercourse among people who might otherwise never have met in their lives. In the Canterbury Tales, we seem to feel that here is the culmination of Chaucer's experiences which had gone before that had helped him to know the world and the people in it so that he could bring together in this poem the group of people from such different classes in society, and could make them vividly real and active in portraying the very life of his day. To the Canterbury Tales Chaucer owes fame and rank as the first poet of modern English literature, and in it the genius and power of the poet is most strongly expressed.

The Tales are of different sorts, and received from different places, but Chaucer modelled them in his own way and adapted them to suit his characters. There are familiar scenes keenly observed and accurately described. This collection of tales, though left uncompleted, shows to the best Chaucer's great and many qualities. In a wonderful way, we can see his masterly power of observation

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1. Ten Brink, Bernard: The History of English Literature. P. 140

and comprehension; we can see his sympathy; we cannot help seeing the art he uses in making his life-like characters stand out, and the skilful way in which they are made to represent all contemporaneous England. We can see the wisdom and good sense of the poet; he knows human nature. His whole plan is so conformed to reason and to nature that he seems far ahead of his day. " His original work, by which he comes to life as a creator, the maker of a new thing, was done, surely in revolt from those foreign glories. He turned from them and entered the abundance of his own self because the World of Art excluded this world of living people, which interested him so deeply."[1] It really is an eminent quality of Chaucer that enables him to write thus. It reveals itself not only in the whole scheme at large, but in the details. It is in his treatment even of details and the effectiveness he makes of them that Chaucer is very apt, especially in this particular work. The very costumes and colors, and expressions of the travelers are all so significantly contributive that nothing is of no account.

He wrote in English in spite of his knowledge of French and Latin and his living where these two languages were in favor. He belongs to the English nation which was shaping itself as a nation more definitely now; and he uses the national language to express his thoughts-he loves truth.

In the very Prologue of this work we feel freshness and truth. We are taken back to the same century--we feel the springtime newness; the sun and winds, and the beauty and joy of the world; the gladness of the birds. Truly this is a great work; the moving life of England of this day passes before us. Chaucer, the student

[1] Masefield, John; Chaucer P. 24

of books, teller of tales, shrewd observer of life, and interpreter of life and men, the man with his broad vision of larger emancipation and his rich gift of a poet is here. The historian of literature is tempted to linger over this Prologue and to quote passages showing how keenly, yet kindly, this first modern poet observed fellowmen. "..in this immortal Prologue Chaucer is a model for all those who would put our human life into writing. The student should read it entire, as an introduction not only to the poet but to all our modern literature."[1.]

The stories here are really dramatic studies as well as masterpieces of narrative. Thy are intensely dramatic in revelation of character and in richness, glory, and gorgeousness. Chaucer's gentleness and passion are revealed as well as his love of goodness. Here was a new creative force. Chaucer's originality was naturally more pronounced as his genius matured, and as we read his masterpiece created after experience had ripened him, we know that he looked to life itself as his inspiration, and that whatever he borrowed from any person or country he made his own. It was through him that foreign influences of three centuries' growth were to find expression in English poetry. He was a great painter of contemporary life of England, and few poets of any age are said to have surpassed this poet of the fourteenth century in the power to observe and to reproduce the aspects of the world around him. He is frank; he is robust; he is wholesome. It is newness of spirit expressed through his talents we are interested in, in this study, and we have already seen it expressed with Chaucer's great power and originality.

With the background of the age in mind, and something of

[1.] Long, W. J.: English Literature P. 78

acquaintance with Chaucer's own life and the influence of the new spirit as it came through Italy especially where it was growing at this time, and with something in regard to his work, we are ready to look at his general characteristics as a poet. The skilfull use and development of his characteristics resulted from his reception of and willingness to further pioneer principles. In getting in mind Chaucer's characteristics as a poet, we shall at the same time set before ourselves those characteristics which resulted from his life---in this age when so much of change was abroad. The significant part of our thorough study of the historical and social background of the century is that it is interrelated with Chaucer,-- his life and works; this background helped to shape and encourage not only Chaucer's life, and attitude, and motives, but his very spirit and methods in his writing. Inspiration is necessary before a great work is done; without it the work could not be the same. Chaucer lived in a critical time; he was fortunate enough not only to see great forces changing age-old fixed principles, but to accept the changing ideals and infuse the spirit of the Renaissance into his work. Certain traits seemed to mark him as one beyond the medieval with only medieval ideas. If ever external circumstances and environment conspired with temperament to produce a poet, we see this in Chaucer. It is of great importance that Chaucer's position in life was such that he was not restricted within narrow limits of a particular station or caste, and that he was favored by experiences and surroundings towards a complete unfolding of his rich individuality in his striving for freer development.

One of the strong points we should emphasize in this study is Chaucer's naturalness and freshness. It is truly remarkable, we are told, especially when we remember how much he read. " The study

of books, in an age when study so often led to pedantry, left him as free and human as it found him."[1] This, indeed, clearly marks this poet, not as medieval, but modern. "He is always natural, because if not always absolutely new, he is always delightfully fresh, because he sets before us the world as it honestly appeared to Geoffrey Chaucer."[2] "Everything he touches leaps into full blossom"[3]..... "He is the most unconventional of poets."[2] This typically portrays Chaucer and his spirit. It also marks him as a man of the new day. How new this freshness and naturalness as compared with the bound conventional of the medieval. Chaucer dares to be himself--he is frank. In this alone, he is already declaring his attitude and position as one who is of the new day. This naturalness and freshness makes up so much of Chaucer's own typical spirit that if we left it out we absolutely would not have Chaucer. It is all through his works, especially as he develops more. Rossetti says of him, "'A charming freshness forms the atmosphere of all his work; he is perpetually new!"[4] If we have read Chaucer and imbibed his spirit, we marvel at one who could be so natural and colorful, and so delightful in a day such as this, and we pay respect to his genius so significant in the history of literature.

Another characteristic we should consider is that of his liquid smoothness. "He had a very fine ear for music, and the tale and the verse go together like the voice and music."[5] "Chaucer's versification, considering the time at which he wrote,....is not one of his least merits."[6] This means more when we remember that

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1. Clark, J.S.: *A Study of English and American Poets* P. 5
2. Clark, J.S.: *A Study of English and American Poets* P. 6
3. Lowell: *Conversations on Some of the Old Poets* P.XXI
4. Clark, J.S.: *A Study of English and American Poets* P. 7
5. Clark, J.S.: *A Study of English and American Poets* P. 8
6. Clark, J.S.: *A Study of English and American Poets* P. 9

he found our language stiff and unwilling, but left it enriched. He left it with the longer measure of the Italian and Provençal poets. He is a master who moulded our language in no mean way, but with power, freedom, variety, and a rythmic beauty. Someone has said there is in his poetry music which hardly loses itself, and at times is as sweet as that of any English poet later." ....by the lovely charm of his diction, the lovely charm of his movement, he makes an epoch and founds a tradition."[1.] Even in Spenser, and Milton, and Keats we can follow something of the liquid diction, the fluid movement of Chaucer. To illustrate the musical characteristic and something of his freshness of spirit I quote:

> "The bisy larke, messager of day,
> Salueth in hir song the morwe gray;
> And fyry Phebus ryseth up so brighte,
> That al the orient laugheth of the lighte,
> And with his stremes dryeth in the greves
> The silver dropes, hanging on the leves." 2.
> --The Knightes Tale.

We cannot picture this poet without his genial humor. This, itself, is something different from that which we find in traditional, medieval writing; it is more alive and real. It is somehow a part of Chaucer, and he has his own peculiar genius in expressing it--we have to know him to feel it in his works as part of him. His very nature was one which liked sunshine and brightness figuratively and in reality. He liked to dwell in regions of brightness and laughter. He is quick to sense a humorous situation and clever in depicting its very atmosphere. His humor is one of his outstanding qualities. "....one meets with Chaucer's pleasant humor which is so shrewd, charming and fresh. Images and allegorical figures--known before--were part of poetry's stock-in-trade, but humor of this sort was a new thing in poetry."[3.] He makes us laugh by broad jest or sometimes by refined irony.

1. Clark, J.S.: A Study of English and American Poets P. 9
2. Skeat, W.W.: The Student's Chaucer P. 438, Lines 1491-1496
3. Masefield, John : Chaucer P. 18

This reminds us of his kindly satire which constitutes another large place in his characteristics, and which is sometimes shown in connection with his humor, and interwoven in a very smooth and effective way expressing Chaucer's own naturalness even here, in his own bubbling over of spirit. Especially valuable and interesting in this consideration, in our study of skepticism, since, as already suggested, he so cleverly and definitely shows skepticism in and through this means. Humor and the power of making a jest at one's own expense is no small art; none of our humorists, it is said, bear this test so well as Chaucer. "The most striking thing about Chaucer's humor is his great kindliness. He laughs, but not maliciously.....He does not joke merely for the sake of joking. He has his humor under such perfect control that he can shift.... point of view..." [1] Truly, humor is playing around most of the time through his work like heat-lightning. His humor lacks cynicism--that is why it is so delightful. Sometimes he brings it in almost parenthetically and very slyly; sometimes he laughs right out with us; at other times, it "twinkles..thru his very tears." [1] "Chaucer drew a certain airiness of sentiment and expression, a felicity of expression, and an elegance of turn hitherto unprecedented and hardly yet matched in our literature, but...kept firm hold of his native soundness of understanding and that genial humor...His humor...in its suavity; its perpetual presence, and its shy unobstrusiveness, is something wholly new in literature." 2.

"A yerd she hadde, enclosed al aboute
With stikkes, and a drye dich with-oute
In which she hadde a cok, hight Chauntecleer,
In al the land of crowing nas his peer.
His vois was merier than the mery orgon
On messe-days that in the chirche gon;
Wel sikerer was his crowing in his logge,
Than is a clokke, or an abbey orlogge,
By nature knew he ech asencioun
Of equinoxial in thilke toun;

1. Clark J.S.: A Study of English and American Poets P. 13
2. Clark J.S.: A Study of English and American Poets P. 12

For whan degrees fiftene were ascended,
Thanne crew he, that it mighte nat ben amended." [1]
--The Nonne Preestes Tale

Another point to be considered as we think of this poet, is, most assuredly his sympathy with suffering. It is there noticeably. The innocence and suffering of women moved him especially. We are told that it is this pity for inevitable suffering that clearly distinguishes him from Boccaccio, and makes him a forerunner of Hamlet. William Hazlitt goes so far as to say that"In depth of simple pathos and intensity of conception, never swerving from his subject, I think no other writer comes near him...." [2] As an illustration:

"O, which a pitous thing it was to see
Hir swowning, and hir humble voys to here!
"Grauntmercy, lord, that thanks I yow, 'quod she,
'That ye han saved me my children dere!
Now rekke I never to ben deed right here;
Sith I stonde in your love and in your grace,
No fors of deeth, ne whan my spirit pace! " 3.
--The Clerkes Tale.

In Chaucer's respect for womanhood, we find an attitude worth mentioning. True, we have spoken of various passages used to express skepticism, towards woman's evil, according to some. But Chaucer was fair. And even those who would believe he was skeptical of the bad living and false actions of woman, would have to admit that towards woman herself he had an attitude which was far beyond the old medieval one. Womanliness is a feature of his women. No matter how much sly fun he pokes, he compensates by his expressions of indignation at their wrongs and his praises of their many virtues. He was chivalrous in his sentiment. Womanhood in distress strikes his heart; the thought of their suffering agitates him. He even stops to express compassion or to make an appeal to Heaven against Fortune or the wickedness of men. "Chaucer alone, in his time, felt the whole beauty of womanhood, and felt it most in its most perfect type." [4] And we must confess that this was not an age of ennobling

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1. Skeat, W.W.: The Student's Chaucer P. 543, Lines 4037-4038
2. Clark, J.S. A Study of English and American Poets P. 14
3. Skeat, W.W.: The Student's Chaucer P. 610, Lines 1086-1092
4. Clark, J.S.: A Study of English and American Poets P. 16

women noticeably.

> "In hir is heigh beautee, with-oute pryde,
> Howthe, with-oute grenehede or folye;
> To alle hir werkes vertu is hir gyde,
> Humblesse hath slayn in hir al tirannye.
> She is mirour of alle curteisye;
> Hir herte is verray chambre of holinesse,
> Hir hand, ministre of fredom for almesse.'" 1.
> --The Tale of the Man of Lawe.

In a previous place we have already spoken of Chaucer's love of nature which was vitally important in the life and works of the poet. He was a lover of nature and a lover of man. It is said that his descriptions of nature are as true as his sketches of character; we know that these were especially true to life, that he knew life and human nature, first-hand. He rubbed up against life in various conditions, and knew the high and low in a singularly unusual way. He loved life and acticity, and he loved the beauty in life, and the beauty in the world--the fields, flowers, birds; the verdure of the English landscape seemed to sink into his very soul. The love for beauties and pleasures of this world was a characteristic of the new Renaissance spirit. It was, however the expression of Chaucer's own spirit. "He was the first who made the love of nature a distinct element in our poetry" 2. His love of it and his familiarity with it seemed to be able to transfigure the very world of nature to a new one. Although the Troubadour hailed spring's return, it was with him but empty ritualism. However, Chaucer's true delight was anything but empty. "He pours himself out in sincere joy and thankfulness." 3. He loved the new green leaves and the singing birds who were his special favorites, as we remember his poetry. "He himself sings more like a bird than any other poet...." 2. "Chaucer's descriptions of natural scenery..have a local truth and freshness which gives the very feeling

1. Skeat W.W.: The Student's Chaucer P. 478, Lines 162-168
2. Clark, J.S.: A Study of English and American Poets P. 18
3. Clark, J.S. A Study of English and American Poets P. 19

of the air, the coolness....of the ground."[1] "Lover of men and lover of books, Chaucer is no less the lover of nature, for her alone delighting to leave his studies."[2] He, indeed, loves the country strongly and all its sounds, animals, and birds; and he has a knowledge of them which comes from his delight in them. From many illustrations, I quote:

> "For May wol have no slogardye a-night.
> The sesoun priketh every gentil herte,
> And maketh him out of his sleep to sterte,
> And seith, 'arys, and do thy observaunce.'"[3]
> --The Knightes Tales
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> "And anone as I the day espied,
> No longer would I in my bed abide,
> But to a wood that was fast by
> I went forth alone boldely,
> And held the way down by a brookes side,
> Till I came to a laund of white and greene,
> So faire a oe had I never in been...."
> ....
> "And the river that I sat upon,
> It made such a noise as it ron,
> Accordaunt with the birdes harmony,
> Me thought it was the beste melody
> That mighte been yheard of any mon.'"[4]
> --The Cuckoo and the Nightingale

We think of him as going out alone in the meadows in the early morning stillness, falling on his knees to greet the daisy.

Now, as to the sincerity and the elevation of character; these really deserve a separate mention. When we think of the age in which this poet lived, we appreciate more than ever his influence in these two directions. "Nobility of soul had ever his warmest admiration without regard to the rank of life in which it was revealed."[5] This ties up with our consideration of his democratic spirit which is typical in his work. We feel that here was a genial sincere man, and a humane one. He left us a picture of the life of his day--such a picture as none else has left. The tone of his

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1. Clark, J.S. : A Study of English and American Poets P. 19
2. Clark, J.S. : A Study of English and American Poets P. 20
3. Skeat, W.W. : The Student's Chaucer P. 432, Lines 1042-1045
4. Clark, J.S. : A Study of English and American Poets P. 21
5. Clark, J.S. : A Study of English and American Poets P. 22

work is kindly, honorable and sincere. His purity of womanhood and nobility of manhood are evident--the man is the more of a gentleman as he performs fine deeds. He loves the truth, does Chaucer. "He does not affect to show his power....There is no artificial pompous display, but a strict parsimony of the poet's material." [1]

"The firste stok, fader of gentilesse--
What man that claymeth gentil for to be,
Must folowe his trace, and alle his wittes dresse
Vertu to sewe, and vyces for to flee
For unto vertu longeth dignitee,
And noght the revers, saufly dar I deme,
Al were he mytre, croune, or diademe." [2]
A Ballad on Gentilesse.

Next we come to the narrative power of Chaucer. Certainly this is important when it is he of whom it is said there is no equal in this respect in our tongue. His success here is said to be attributed largely to the ease and fullness with which he is able to make us enter into his own thoughts and very feelings. He is the great story-teller of the English language because he seizes the central points of interest and leaves out all that does not contribute to the effectiveness of the whole. "Chaucer is like a jeweller with his hands full: pearls and glass beads, sparkling diamonds and common agates, black jet and ruby roses, all that history and imagination had been able to gather and fashion during three centuries in the East, in France, in Wales, in Provence, in Italy. All that had rolled his way, clashed together, broken or polished by the stream of centuries, and by the great jumble of human memory: he holds in his hand, arranges it, composes therefrom a long sparking ornament...." [3] The pleasure which Chaucer himself takes in telling his stories is not to be omitted--it has an effect of skill, and although his personality is not obtruding, it pervades the whole and gives an atmosphere of individuality. "He is the

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1. Clark, J.S. A Study of English and American Poets P. 23
2. Skeat, W.W.: The Student's Chaucer P. 122, Lines 1-7
3. Clark, J.S.: A Study of English and American Poets P. 24

prince of story-tellers."[1] We feel the eloquence in his stories. He is animated; his works are full of power, yet filled with ease of movement in spite of the gayety. There is no tediousness for the reader who understands Chaucer; his descriptions are not dull, nor does he linger in his narrative. It is remarkable with all his vivacity, that he knows when to pass on to something else; and also, he knows how to make remarkable transitions.

> "At Sarray, in the land of Tartarye,
> Ther dwelte a king, that werreyed Russye,
> Thurgh which ther deyde many a doughty man.
> This noble king was cleped Cambinskan,
> Which in his tyme was of so greet renoun
> That ther nas no-wher in no regioun
> So excellent a lord in alle thing; " 2.
> --The Squieres Tale.

In the characteristics of realism and minuteness of detail, and vividness by means of apt strokes we really have Chaucer. These are some of the qualities by which we feel and know him in his works. There is a difference between telling a story and bringing the world of people before us, letting us see them pass along, making us feel that we actually know them. Other fourteenth-century writers could tell a story, it is said, but they could not bring the world before us as did Chaucer. "Chaucer is the first to break away from the dreary traditional style and give us not merely stories but the lively pictures of real life as the ever renewed substance of poetry....His parson is still unmatched, though Dryden and Goldsmith have both tried..."[3] As the poet of real life, Chaucer excels--he was the most practical poet, himself a man of the world. Indeed, in the Prologue of the Canterbury Tales we have the most masterly thing Chaucer left us. In its own way, it is almost the most wonderful thing in the language. The people are so real they seem like those we really know; we see not only

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1. Clark, J.S.: A Study of English and American Poets P. 25
2. Skeat, W.W.: The Student's Chaucer P. 628, Lines 9-15
3. Clark, J.S.: A Study of English and American Poets P. 28

their faces, and clothing (the very texture), but we know what they think, and how they act. It is Chaucer's art which enables us to see them as we do. He gives no irrelevant description, nor uncalled for sentiment; he uses no over-done style, nor any ornamented way; but every little careless, or sly touch reveals something of character. Shakespeare never did so much for his day--he gave philosophy, thoughts, dramatic action, but from him we do not have a whole century speaking for itself. "Class by class, the real English home-life; ...the colors, the manners, the accents, the dress, the characters, the science, --town, field, park and river scenery, farm-house, inn, castle, and wharf, all brought back to us,.....down to the cat driven from the best seat, the pet dog, birds, and the coals on the fire. We get that from Chaucer....His characters are splendidly varied and true to nature." 1.

> "Blak was his berd, and manly was his face.
> The cercles of his eyen in his heed,
> They gloweden bitwixe yelow and reed;
> And lyk a griffon loked he aboute,
> ....
> His shuldres brode, his armes rounde and longe.
> And as the gyse was in his contree,
> Ful hye up-on a char of gold stood he,
> With foure whyte holes in the trays." 2.
> -- The Knightes Tale.

As to another of Chaucer's outstanding qualifications, we need to say more of his portrayal of character. This is seen especially in his masterpiece as well as in all his work of note. It is said that the reason he is the first really great portrayer of character is because he was the first great observer of it among the European writers. He shows penetrating insight into men's minds, and has a power of skill in generalizing of men and manners. His characters "are the very quintessence of human nature." 3. They live, as they did on their journey hundreds of years ago. His personages not only

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1. Clark, J.S.: A Study of English and American Poets P. 29
2. Skeat, W.W.: The Student's Chaucer P. 445, Lines 2130-2133-2136 (2139
3. Clark, J.S.: A Study of English and American Poets P.31

live; they feel; what goes through their minds or is spoken by them has decisive character and somehow makes them human. It is a subtleness which Chaucer possesses which helps to make this so. Above all, Chaucer's eye for character catches sight of more than the mental and physical features; it appreciates the variety of costume. "The characters of Chaucer's pilgrims are the characters which compose all ages and all nations."[1] In regard to Chaucer's portrayal of characters, "Chaucer alone comes near to Shakespeare in that supreme quality of a dramatist which enables him to show the characters of men as they are betrayed by themselves, wholly developed as if from within, not as described from without by an imperfect and prejudiced observer...."[2] It is the first time in English poetry that we come face to face not with characters of the past, but with living and breathing men distinct in temper and sentiment as well as in face or costume, or even mode of speech. This is a far-reaching thought. It is the first time, too, that we meet with the dramatic power which not only creates each character, but which continues it and adjusts, as does Chaucer. Chaucer loves life. It is his largeness of heart and wide tolerance that enables him to reflect man.

> " Embrouded was he, as it were a mede
> Al ful of fresshe floures, whyte and rede.
> Singinge he was, or floytinge, al the day;
> He was as fresh as is the month of May." 3.

To speak of Chaucer's place in literature and his contributions would be to reconsider what we have already said. It remains to re-emphasize his newness and place as a modern man, in concluding, but we have already discussed this also, the greatest evidence of both being in his works and characteristics we have considered. There was a promise of the future in his writing. Born in the midst of religious, political, and literary activity and promotion, he was,

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1. Clark, J.S.: A Study of English and American Poets P. 32
2. Clark, J.S.: A Study of English and American Poets P. 34
3. Skeat, W.W.: The Student's Chaucer P. 420, Lines 89-92

in our consideration not so much at the end of the period of the Middle Ages as at the beginning of the modern world. It is his interest in and attitude towards the world as it was to be which sets forth much of his dissatisfaction with traditional, conventional, time-old ways of life, and his inception of and encouragement of the new.

So we leave this study of the newness in the age of Chaucer with the same thought we had as we began, that of Chaucer as one who did not cling strictly and solely to the traditional, stilted, and superficial in life and attitude, but accepted new development not merely because it was new, but because he caught a vision of a more natural life and free owed to individuals, based not upon ignorance, but upon Truth. As he accepted new ideas for his life, so he did for his work; and his great contribution to literature came because he was willing to go beyond what had been, infusing a new Renaissance spirit.

It is said that in Chaucer alone do we find narrative in such perfection--simple, direct, fluent, varying, the subject filled with the writer's rich individuality; and everywhere his own abounding humor, with verse of unfailing measure, absolutely natural and at ease. It is said, I repeat, there are few English poets to whom we would attribute such a combination of these qualities, and no other who has combined them to the same extent. "Chaucer is the first English writer to bring the atmosphere of romantic interest about the men and women and the daily work of one's own world--which is the aim of nearly all modern literature."[1] His newness merges with his place as a modern character. Until Chaucer's day literature had concerned chiefly gods and heroes of a golden age. It had been romantic largely so had not tried to study men and women or describe them as they are so the reader would recognize

[1] Long, J.W.: English Literature P.77

them not as ideal heroes, but as neighbors of his. Chaucer accomplished such a task, though, and so well that his characters were true to life and recognized as such, and became the permanent possession of our literature. "He himself deliberately made a fresh beginning in our literature."[1] "It is enough to say, that as no other man has told a story in English verse with equal terseness of humor, the name of Chaucer still holds a place alone in the list of English poets that remain unforgotten and unforgetable."[2]

Chaucer made his work different. "Chaucer differed from his predecessors, and most of his successors, less in the amount which he borrowed than in the extraordinary vitality and originality which he infused into the older work."[3] Towards the end of the fourteenth century, Chaucer's work came which marks an entirely new era in English poetry. Chaucer has been called the Father of English poetry. The title may be a bit misleading to some who remember that there had been something of poetic value produced before him. Yet, in another sense, the title is deserved. Chaucer was our first great poet. He produced more than a few noble poetic pieces which stood out definitely from the mass of mediocre work around him. He had excellence; he did not follow blindly a convention or tradition either in subject or versification. He drew on his whole varied experience of life. He rendered a service to our English language which itself would entitle him to respect and remembrance. Out of chaos he made order. He welded French and English elements that had existed side by side without union, into one speech which was to be a medium for poetic thought. He set a standard to be accepted by all coming after him. "The love of the spring was in his blood, and he himself represents the spring-tide

1. Chamber's Cyclopedia of English Literature Vol I, P. 59
2. Fleay, F.G.: Guide to Chaucer and Spenser P. 15
3. Coulton, G.G.: Chaucer and His England P. 39

of our modern poetry."[1] When we look at Chaucer now and his works with the newness of spirit, he hardly seems like one whose career stopped centuries ago, "for his pages are as fresh with the perfume of flowers, and his pictures glow with a life and animation as real as that which we see around us all the time."[2] Especially fitting is the description of reading his works: "'reading him is like brushing through the dewy grass at sunrise. Everything is now sparkling and fragrant.'"[3]

Indeed, the skepticism of Chaucer is exhibited in his refusal to adhere to the dead, spiritless, and artificial in life, and in his belief in and use of exuberance and enthusiasm, his love of freedom, and joy, and independence.

[1] Long, J. W.: English Literature P. 60
[2] Gilman, Arthur: The Poetical Works of Geoffrey Chaucer P.LXXXVIII
[3] Clark, J.S.: A Study of English and American Poets P.6

SUMMARY

In this study of Chaucer and the new spirit of the fourteenth century we think of Chaucer at the end of an old order and at the beginning of a new. He did not follow blindly current conventions and medieval methods and artificialties. He refused to accept these and infused in his work a new spirit of freedom making his poems individual and free. To be sure he was, in his early writing, a translator, but he was to become one of the most individual of poets; he did have monotonous verse, at first, but he was to attain metrical freedom; in the beginning he used the prevalent manner, but he was to enrich English literature with new metres of importance and a new range of subjects. Chaucer is one of the great poets; he holds this place because he went beyond his predecessors of medieval time. His work is characteristic of something greater than the old order of things. His work pictures accurately the life of the century - this century which was at the beginning of a new order as old traditions were being shaken. His vivid pictures of the life of his time reflect the change which was in the air through the various characters with their attitudes, actions, and interplay. His manner and style of writing was expressive of freedom and enthusiasm and charm. His poems themselves are of the present world with its pleasure and joy, and its problems. Chaucer himself loved life and freedom.

However, the newness was not something peculiar to Chaucer alone. This was a century of change - one which marked greater freedom and independence in all fields. It is this background with which Chaucer was identified, and which we must understand

in order to see its correlation with Chaucer's life and writing. Although this century had not yet completely thrown off the medieval, it was beginning to be a world of the coming Renaissance. It is these traces of the new spirit breaking the old forms, of the new impulses set in force, and the strong, active discontent with old traditionary institutions and conditions, - it is these forces we are to study with their influence on Chaucer who is in so many ways typical of the new day. The age in which he lived had a strong influence upon him.

Stability, which in medieval days had been a marked characteristic, was being weakened. This fact made for a changing atmosphere and for various possibilities far skepticism of the old, and opportunities for the encouragement of greater independence. It encouraged thought about new ways of life. When one boundary or restriction is broken, it is easier for another to be shattered. When new thought in the minds of the people began to take place it was hard to hold them to cramped limits of older authority. A new life was beginning to throb although it could not come to its own fully yet; however, it was developing. The new life was to find itself in the Renaissance.

Among the many expressions of the new feeling, there was one around which the plan of life revolved; this was the decline of the old manorial system which, although it had been a backbone of society in the Middle Ages, was to break away from the restricted thought of the old regime. The two great essentials in the old scheme had been land and labor; the lord gave land and protection in exchange for labor; tenants-in-chief held land from the king as overlord rendering obedience and certain dues, letting out portions of their land in the same way to subordinate vassals.

There had been certain classes of people the breakdown of which signified a newer day. The support of the system was in its agriculture which was very primitive in methods and results. The attempt to give each person strips of land that he might have some good with his bad ground was wasteful and weak, leaving divisions of land unused, and requiring much time to reach because of its scattered locations, and affording poor chance to neighbors' lands which might be next to a poor worker's holdings full of weeds. But, more than these, there was little scope for originality and enterprise; all had to go according to a set plan; it was stationary. There was no room for progress - the life was controlled by customs and tradition, and by separation from the outside world. Unity, but narrowness characterized the organization which was self-centered, without provision for change and growth.

But there came a time when life did change, and the old institution could not stand in the face of it. It is its breakdown which is expressive of much that was new in Chaucer's age. The stability which it had marked in the medieval period was shaken. The changes which followed the downfall of this system were widespread touching all fields in the century. Many of the new ideas and changes were made possible through the weakening of the old system which was a means in its debilitation of greater freedom and independence. The increase in the use of money helped, too, towards change and development and the stimulation of more freedom. It was to revolutionize society and to make possible a new basis, and improved methods of living with more liberty in society. Commutation of labor for money was encouraged which, in turn, was a blow to the old narrowness, and a force towards

wider liberation, away from class restrictions and servitude.

Other conspicuous changes in Chaucer's century were those concerned with the terrible plagues of this time. The immediate results were chaotic; depopulation with its concomitant factors was a serious matter. Changes were forced upon people now; there was no choice; new methods had to be used to sustain life. Old authority and customs of the ages was broken. There was distress, misery, and discontent, - great restlessness. The Black Death hastened the decay of the old system; it helped to break rigid customs; it was a shock to the settled and established relations of men. This fact was its great contribution to the new spirit of the fourteenth century, that it altered the old stability thus making change easier in the future.

In the Statutes of Labor we see an attempt to hold to old laws; legislation was tried again and again, but was futile because of changed conditions. Laws could not be enforced; there was a spirit of independence growing; neither could they bring back former ways of living or former authority. The Statutes themselves with their frequent penalties became a cause for the growth of hostility which led on to the Peasants' Revolt. Heavy taxes, also, contributed to this Revolt in causing added discontent. The poll tax seemed like an unbearable weight added to the already overburdened people to contribute to expenses which seemed never to end. This tax fell upon many not taxed before, and its method offered chance for unfairness and favoritism, and misunderstanding. A bitter feeling of resentment was caused which was dangerous in its emphasis of the attitude of rebellion on the part of the people.

The Peasants' Revolt itself was an outstanding exemplification

of the new spirit of the century shown in an effort to resist the old authority. It was an expression of self-assertion and independence very significant in nature. The trend of this spirit was marked, and each expression of it was itself a new force encouraging more change. This event is really not so important in the immediate results it brought forth, for our study, as it is in the significance as an attempt towards more freedom. All objects sought by the Rebellion were not found; all demands were not granted. However, it was what the insurgents sought for, and what they voiced protests against which is significant. Although the immediate result was failure, in a sense, it was the impulse which must be valued in this study. The results are to be found in the greater rapidity and definite direction given to changes already in progress rather than merely in starting a new way of life immediately. New-born liberty was being invoked.

Various forces were contributing to change and broadening influence, some of which were inter-weaving. The towns were helping to develop beyond narrow, old-world boundaries. Wider communication and intercourse were a stimulus. The Gilds were meeting a need created by changing situations which gave more control and responsibility to the people at large. As population and trade increased in the centers, organizations were created for regulation. With the increase of trade, there was more subdivision into special lines; the Merchant-Gild which included all trades could not cope with the problems of each separate craft in the growing complexity. A new demand brought forth a new means, the Craft-Gild. These associations successful in the fourteenth century filled a need. When even different changes came and

new demands were made later, the associations decayed with the growth of population, of trade, and with the greater use of money. Towns ceased to be concerned with agriculture so much, but were more dependent on the country, while the country depended more on the town for other supplies. Inter-change on a larger scale, local, national and international was encouraged.

Another contributing factor to the new spirit of the century was trade with its stimulus to wider contact and knowledge, contributing as it did to the desire for greater independence, and thus a means of it. New contacts, and ideas, and enterprise were felt; towns which began as self-sufficient communities were widening their relations thus producing results of inestimable importance in making for newness in various fields. Travel brought knowledge which made for more light and intelligence, and encouraged the demand for wider freedom in living. England was beginning to feel her power and possibilities in trading and shipping; merchants were of great consequence. Altogether, forces were gathering around trade which were to strengthen and increase the power and position of people in the history of England and its development of the new through trade and its accompanying possibilities.

There was, in general, a closer participation in the life of Europe. The decline of chivalry helped to break the old medieval ideas; the trend towards changed classes of society and newer methods was emphasized. Fundamentals of medieval society were modified; institutions grounded upon them were not to hold. Parliment with its growth of power and influence, though in an embryonic state at the end of the thirteenth century, was to obtain strength and organization that was to make it a vital

part of the government thereafter. We glimpse here strengthening of principles significant in bringing forth freedom for individuals. The English language itself was expressive of the feeling of nationalism and independence of tradition. It was a phase of the spirit of the growing national life, and the casting off of traditions.

In the religious field especially do we see exhibited emphatically the new spirit. Here we find perhaps the strongest skepticism towards time-honored authority and convention. Wycliffe represents the trend against unjust authority and power and evil, to freedom, and liberty, and justice. In this century doubt was fostered, respect and reverence were shattered for authority. The beginning of such attitudes was to lead on to reform finally. A radical change was beginning to be felt, and was weakening the very foundations. The Church, sadly in need of redemption from worldliness and corruption, made strengthening of power its purpose; it was filled with pride, haughtiness, and avariciousness. In the effort to amass wealth and power, the Church failed to fulfill its divine purpose, and failed to administer spiritual life to all. The shame into which the Church with its leaders had fallen weakened its hold on the mind of the people.

Chaucer pictures frankly the depravity of the times in the religious field, thus emphasizing the awfulness of conditions, and bringing to light the evil going on, and the need for better living. His characters are more familiar with worldly pleasures than spiritual affairs. The monastery was filled with vice rather than virtue. There were many signs of change and expansion. Wycliffe, the fore-runner of later Protestants in using the Bible as the standard of belief and practice, and in rejecting cer-

tain customs and doctrines of the medieval church,--this man voiced the growing dissatisfaction of many. He led on to liberation through more knowledge of the Bible and the right to judge for oneself; through breaking the might of superstitions of the centuries. He was a force towards bringing forth freedom rather than slavery, and light rather than darkness in the religious realm.

But we are interested in Chaucer and his life in such a period of change,---the part he took, and the influence upon him. As we study his life we realize what an unusually active part he took in his day in addition to his work as a writer. His England was filled with activity,---activity much of which was filled with a new feeling of progress and enthusiasm. Opportunities were afforded Chaucer which he grasped,--opportunities in business which were of value also to his writing. He was receiving knowledge and experience and inspiration which were to serve him as a poet. The historical background we have already studied was to stimulate him greatly to newer things. Intangible values of understanding, appreciation, and power were encouraged in Chaucer's activity. The background conditions were vital as determining forces in his life and career.

It is important that this poet's activity was not confined to a narrow province but embraced manifold spheres. So it was that his experience was able to furnish him with a broad intelligence and range of judgment, room for a free outlook, and an acquaintance with existing conditions with their many changes and new ideas. No wonder that Chaucer could write as one who knew what he was saying,--he knew life itself. In his works we see the results of a fullness made possible largely through the

the abundant opportunities he had of becoming familiar with all ranks and their very thoughts and desires behind their actual deeds.

Chaucer's life is so important it is hardly less characteristic of the new nation than his works are. His love of life in this world, and participation of and enjoyment in contemporary activities rather than mere retirement and contemplation of a future world; his love of beauty, of nature, of people; his love of adventure, his humor; his democratic attitude, and his spirit of freedom and joy in living,---all these bespeak characteristics in his biography which mark him as the poet of the new England.

Among the most significant of his official duties,--significant for literature--were his trips to Italy. This was the century of Dante, Petrarch, and Boccaccio, great names connected with the Renaissance. In Italy the new love for beauty was active; Chaucer met this influence, and loved it. He was easily susceptible to such charm and fascination as was in the air. He was fundamentally affected by such expansion as he found. Through his reading of the classics he was to be inspired with a new enthusiasm and spirit. A power was to set Chaucer's own spirit free. It was the new and greater possibilities awakened in Chaucer which were of such importance. He was encouraged to greater literary breadth, independence, and ideals. These influences are of inestimable value in Chaucer's life. They are what encouraged him to go beyond old-time convention to greater freedom in spirit and form. Chaucer's own personality seemed to love such newness; he loved life with beauty and liberation from narrowness.

The events of Chaucer's life were of great value to him as a man and as a poet in directing him away from merely traditional

to that which was characteristic of newness. It was due largely to Chaucer's relationship with an active participation in affairs of his day that his poetical genius could give us the Canterbury Tales. He received training not from books, but from life. It would be hard to think of a career more thoroughly fitted as a preparation for his task as poet than his own. None could have had a broader, more intimate acquaintance with the life of the time with all its complexity and change. While all this did not make him a poet, it helped to train his powers which made him a poet. He had a deep sense of the joy; beauty; pleasure in birds, and flowers, and brooks. His was a well-balanced nature. His activities were potent with meaning in regard to his works; they enlarged the range and possibility of his genius. His experiences broadened him; he read; he traveled; he came in contact with the new thoughts and ideas, and with the forces of a new world.

There was a new spirit breaking in this century. This affected Chaucer's life, and through his life, his works. Chaucer's works reflect the spirit of his day, and are characteristic of his expression of the new. He was an admirer of frankness and truth, and he defended it against the false and superficial. He represents the characters and conditions of his day through their words, actions, dress, and even their thoughts and desires. He does not fail to represent them in all their evil and falseness, because he makes them true to life. Thus it is, in painting them so truly, he shows us those conditions with which there was much discontent and dissatisfaction, and against which people were to arise, and to demand freedom and justice. Chaucer does not even pretend to be a reformer. But he pictures for us conditions which are in the century to be weakened and disrupted.

Much of the evil and vice and luxury were present in the re-

ligious realm involving probably the most vital question of the day. Here, within this realm was probably the greatest break with the old towards encouragement of an unheard of breadth of liberation of thought and judgment for oneself. Among Chaucer's keenest portrayal of the conditions which were to receive a blow in the changing movement were those of the Monk, the Friar, the Summoner, and the Pardoner with their vice, greed, and falseness open and secret. Very vividly does Chaucer portray the evil; he breathes through his characters, as they represent the spirit of his age, and skepticism towards the old narrow bad conditions. Even the Parson whose pure and good life is such a contrast to that which actually is present seems like a rebuke to the evil to some readers, even if Chaucer did not write it in that vein.

From Chaucer's own life and personality, we feel that he was a democratic person. He knew and touched all ranks, we know, and we feel that he was not narrow in his attitude towards people even of lower rank. His company was the company of all mankind, not the rich, or high. He not only knew mankind, but loved it. He did not seem to be one to believe a traditional idea that rank or nobility depended on birth, but rather to be one who believed in a chivalry of good deeds. One who understood men as he did, and was so human was not the kind to encourage class distinctions of medieval time; life was broader than that. From what I read of Chaucer I take him to be one believing in the new democratic spirit which meant more of enjoyment of life for all.

Knowing what we do of the life of Chaucer, he seems very frank and fair in his life and attitudes, and his writings in general. He does not try to cover up evil, or falseness, or superficiality, or deception. He portrays it as it is, bad as it is. In his

writing our attention is called to various evils based on emptiness and superficiality rather than the truth. His frankness and admiration of truth allow him to picture the times accurately,--times reflecting and calling forth changes which were to break through.

But it was the characteristics and style of Chaucer in his writing which expressed especially his newness and enthusiasm and Renaissance attitude, and which mark him not as medieval, but modern. He had felt the new spirit in his life, and had met its influence in his day, but here was the result in his work. He was to do more than admire it. He was to turn away from the old to use the new. It was the new influence which was to make possible the greatest use of his own genius. Many new thoughts and impulses replenished and broadened Chaucer's life and found expression in his literary work. Some were shown in situations set forth and in treatment of situations, for he infused a something new and original,--something beyond the conventional. He renounced conventions and limitations and finally turned to his own English people, after growing in his powers and freedom with the enthusiasm of the Renaissance spirit. He dares to be himself, to judge and criticize.

In his great Canterbury Tales his whole plan seems far ahead of his day with the life-like characters. There is revelation of character, richness, and glory. He looked to life itself for inspiration. Through him influences of the growth of several centuries were to find expression in English poetry. Chaucer lived at a time when he could not only see great forces changing age-old fixed principles, but he accepted changing ideals and infused the spirit of the Renaissance into his work. Certain traits especially seem to mark Chaucer as one beyond the medieval with only medieval ideas. One is his naturalness and freshness, which mark him, not

as medieval, but modern. He is unconventional but he is himself. Before, poets had not dared to express themselves always as they had felt, or by means Chaucer dared to use. This characteristic marks him of the new day,--he is not bound by the traditional. Along with this, goes his liquid smoothness the full expression of which was possible with the development of freedom. He helped to enrich expression with his power, variety, and rythmic beauty. We can follow his liquid diction somewhat in great poets who came after him, --poets of a more modern day.

Still a different consideration important here is that of his genial humor. It is the kind we do not find in medieval work; it is something new as he uses it in his own peculiar way. To be sure, there had been images and figures before, a part of the stock-in-trade of poetry, but nothing like Chaucer's humor. His kindly satire is closely allied. It expresses Chaucer's own naturalness, and is interwoven very smoothly and effectively. His skill in poking fun so slyly yet kindly is characteristic of him. His use of it is different, is something new in literature.

We may note, also, this poet's sympathy with suffering. His pity for inevitable suffering distinguishes him from predecessors, and makes him a forerunner of later poets. Along with this, we may mention his respect for womanhood, which is worth noticing. In this age, there was not much feeling for the beauty of womanhood; this was not an age for ennobling women. But Chaucer expresses womanliness in his characters, frankly, when picturing purity.

In Chaucer's love of nature we have something which was of great significance in the poet's work. He loved nature, and men; his descriptions of both were true to life. It was natural for him to love nature, since he admired so much beauty in the world; this

included the fields, the flowers, and the birds. The love for beauties and pleasures of this world was not only a characteristic of the Renaissance spirit; it was the expression of Chaucer's own spirit. The return of spring had been hailed in poetry before, but in an empty sort of way. Chaucer made the love of nature a different element in poetry. His freshness gave the very feeling of the air, or the perfume of the flowers.

As to his sincerity and elevation of character, they really deserve a separate mention. The attitude he took towards nobility of soul regardless of rank ties up with the new democratic spirit. Here was a humane, sincere man; his tone is kindly, honorable, and frank. Not artificiality, but truth, does he admire; the man is a gentleman who performs fine deeds.

The narrative power when infused with the new spirit is so great that we are told there is no equal in this respect in our tongue. Used as it was by Chaucer, it was characteristic of more than the traditional; it was richer, fuller, and freer. He is skillful, animated, full of ease.

Such characteristics as those of realism, minuteness of detail, vividness through apt strokes used by Chaucer inspired with newness of spirit are qualities which point him to the modern. His people are real; he breaks away from the old set style; we know what the people are thinking we know them so well. It is Chaucer's genius and the spirit which kindled it which makes it possible for us to see them as we do.

The portrayal of character is especially outstanding, in our consideration. He was the first great observer of it. He portrays him as from within, not without. He loves mankind and knows it. It is this largeness of heart and wide tolerance that enable him to reflect man.

Indeed, the evidences of Chaucer as a modern man are outstanding. There was a promise of the future in his writing. Born in the midst of various kinds of activity, he was in our study more at the beginning of the new than at the end of the old. Chaucer differed from his predecessors; he infused a vitality and enthusiasm resulting from an inspiration of a newer spirit.

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